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AUGUST 2025

Laverda Jota

Happy 50th to the Italian heavyweight

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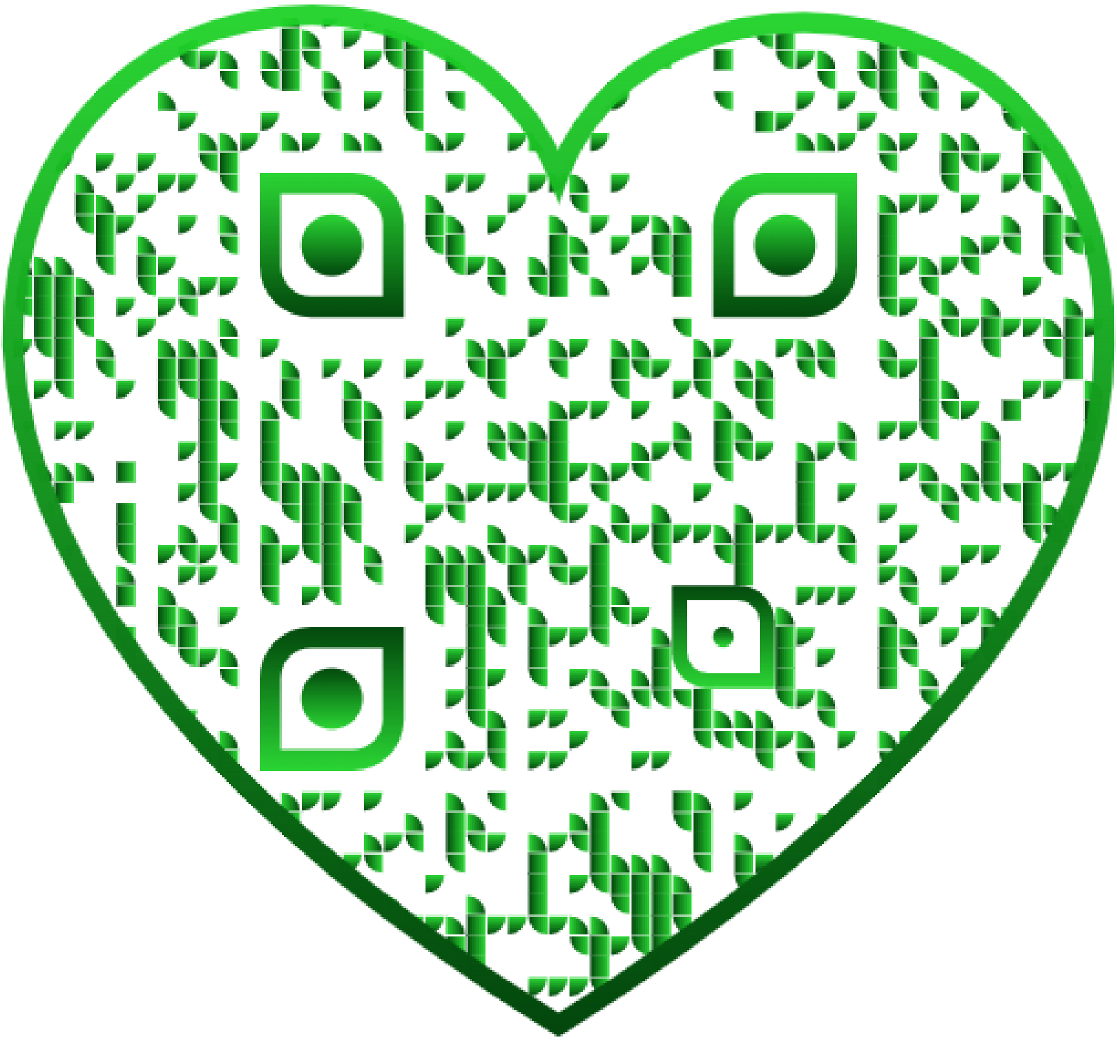
T150V super bike

MV125 GTLS
Italian lightweight style



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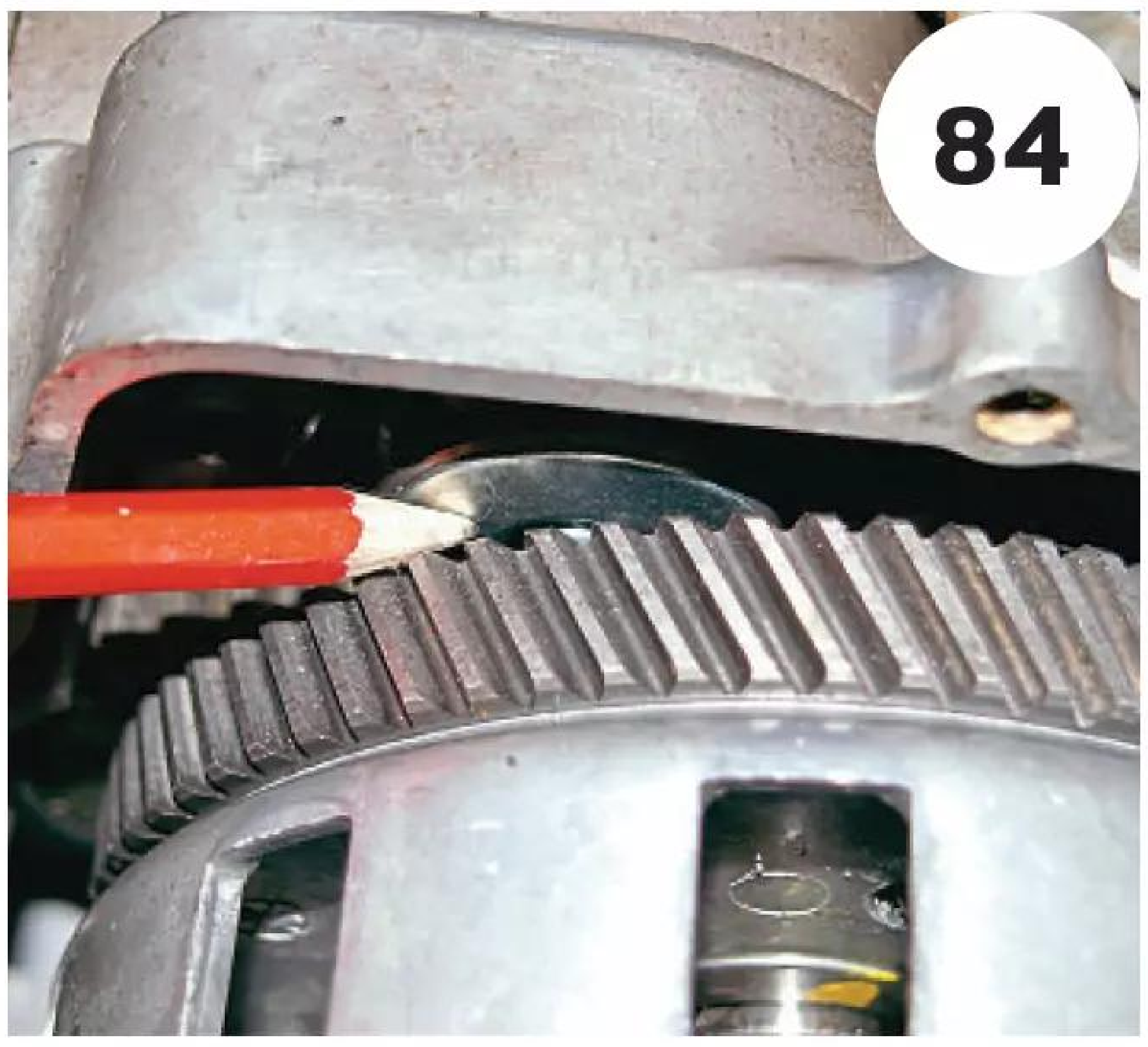
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CLASSIC BIKE GUIDE
BSA B31

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SCAN ME

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Time...

GREETINGS! MAY YOUR OIL BE THE correct weight for these wonderful temperatures and the nuts and rivets be to the satisfaction of those counters we all love to hear.

It is written in statute that we never have enough time. Beauty you can buy, feign intelligence you can, and wealth can be fabricated, yet time drips away, regardless of our best efforts.

But who says you can't make the most of it? For several years, Maria had this great idea to make the most of living in Norfolk and on the longest day, see the sunrise in the east and the sunset in the west. This year's summer solstice was a Saturday, so no excuses! Up at 2.45am to head out by 3.15am on our way to Ness Point, Lowestoft, the most easterly point on the UK mainland.

Riding at this time is odd. You travel towards a steadily increasing light, even at that time, yet it's black in the mirrors. And there is nothing around – for about 50 miles, we possibly saw four vehicles. It was perfect temperature to ride in, but as you dipped down into towards the rivers and streams, it got noticeably colder, while rising up brought warmth – it was estimated the day would be the hottest of the year so far. We didn't take the mickey of the limits… just keeping a good average speed brought our travelling time down nicely.

The BMW R100RS hummed along – this old barge is made for this. Snacks, a camera, and a drink *(don't forget the kitchen sink – Maria)* were swallowed up in the briefcase panniers, while Maria's Tribsa stayed at home as we didn't want to risk any issues with the impending heat later on in the day, so her Ducati Scrambler made light work.

Getting to Ness Point with 15 minutes to spare, for some reason, we were surprised that others had the same idea. We met four riders heading for Land's End that evening, via breakfast in London, and a lady called Tracey Musgrave playing a soothing backing sound on two giant Earth Gongs as the sun rose into a perfectly clear sky.

The rest of the day was endless, and included plenty of riding, a service, seeing some people, a poorly dog, and then riding up to Hunstanton to see the sun set. The carnival was in full swing as many bikers joined holidaymakers to see the end of the day. Several hundreds of miles in mainly 30-degrees heat and 17 hours of daylight finally caught up with us on the way home, but the amount we had managed in one day was incredible. The bikes never missed a beat, the peace before most are awake was sublime, and doing the same feat in a car would have been much less involving.

Some people will never find out what old bikes have to offer. Let them into our secret – but warn them it's addictive. A chap recently felt he needed to sell his Commando due to his hip. But driven by the recent dip in value and the realisation of what he'd be missing, he opted for an electric start instead. That's the spirit – these things are no good if you don't enjoy them!

Enjoy,

Matt

Matt Hull

editor@classicbikeguide.com

■ Speedway – the second most popular sport in the country. In 1980... But flat track is growing and has a vintage class!

Speedway was a mainstay for motorcycle sport. It was seen as a good evening out, there would be a track in many towns and cities, and it wasn't expensive.

For many, many reasons, it's been diminishing over the last 40 years, and just last month Birmingham Speedway announced 2025 is the last season of speedway racing in the second largest city. There are now about 20 tracks left in the UK.

Speedway isn't over. Far from it, thanks to the enthusiasm of a large core of people. But it will take time, changes, luck and, of course, money. Like Sittingbourne Speedway track in Iwade, in the shadow of the Sheppey and Kingsferry bridges in Kent. It's built around an old Second World War anti-aircraft gun site that would have been in a perfect position to track aircraft as they approached the River Medway, Thames, and the Swale. In fact, speedway has helped preserve this historic site on the edge of the marshes, giving it a new lease of life, yet keeping the excellent remains intact. Meetings for the Kent Eagles are held regularly, and they are really pushing young riders. It's less than an hour from London, and to find out more, go to **kenteagles.com**

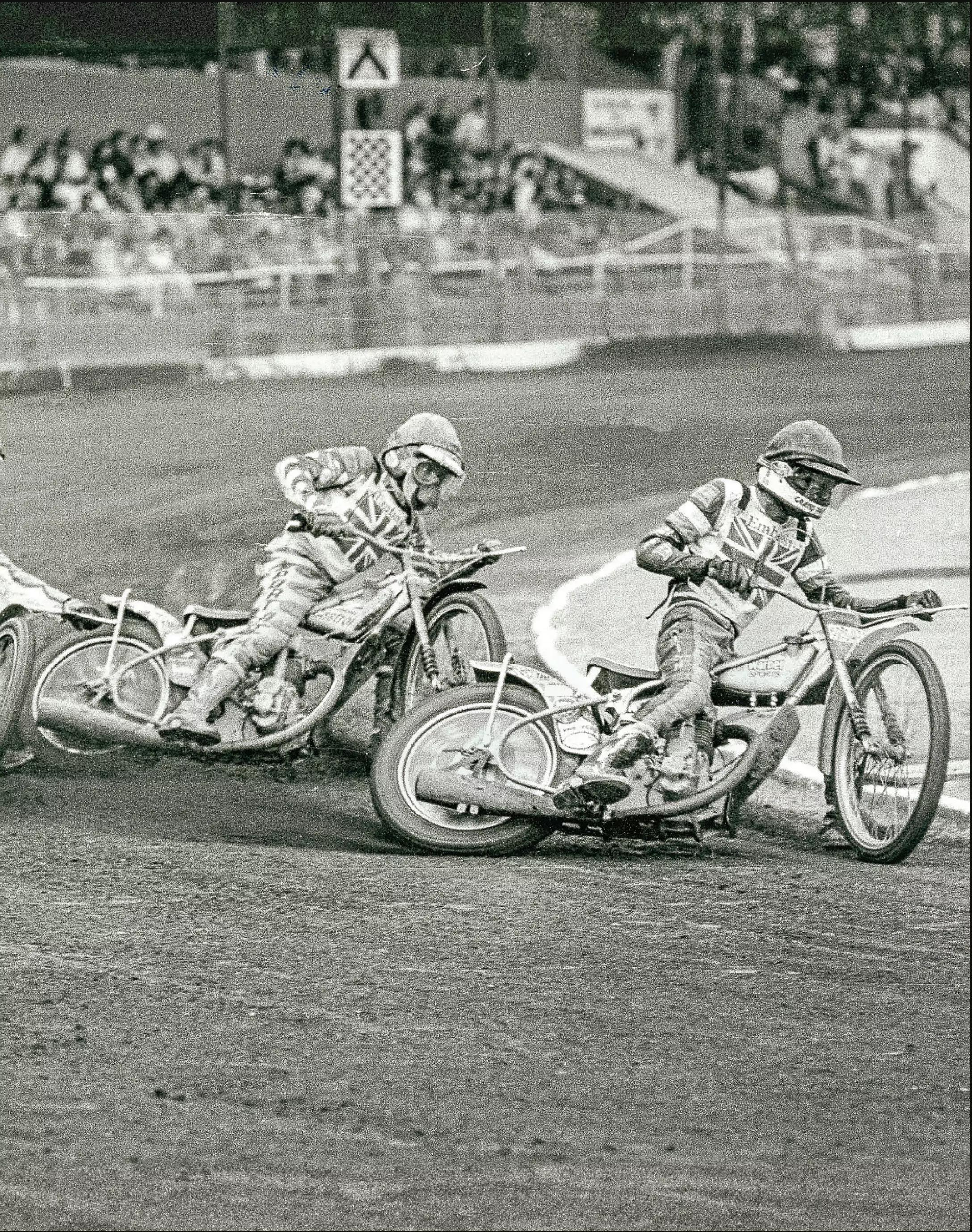
Meanwhile, there has been a quiet, slow-growing flame from across the pond – flat track racing. Flat track is mostly run on speedway ovals but can be on horse trotting tracks, and some TT courses even have left and right turns! Bikes run a rear brake and suspension, whereas speedway bikes have no brakes and very minimal front suspension only – and when we say minimal, we mean rubber bands...

Races have heats and finals like other racing and speedway, but you can have 12 riders instead of four, and races are over longer lengths, too. This brings entertaining racing for competitors and spectators alike – one element speedway often failed on was as the bikes and riders has evolved to be so good, the race is often won by whoever gets into the first corner first.

The Americans have been racing ovals since time immemorial, when Indians fought Harley-Davidsons. But while the sport is new over here, the British went over and caused a sensation with factory teams in the 1960s to push British makes like Triumph and BSA.

Like all sports, it has had highs and lows in the US, but while presently small, flat track is only growing in the UK and its fanbase is keen, and critically, younger. This means they're switched on with what people want today.

Oval racing isn't disappearing, but it has had to evolve. And flat track racing will have a part to play to keep this exciting world alive and thriving. If you've never been before, go and have a night at the races. **Dirttrackriders.co.uk** CBG



Roland's job was formed with a Jota

Laverda Jota - happy 50th!

Never meet your heroes, or so the saying goes. It's usually sound advice, but renowned bike journalist Roland Brown finds an exception – the bike that started his career

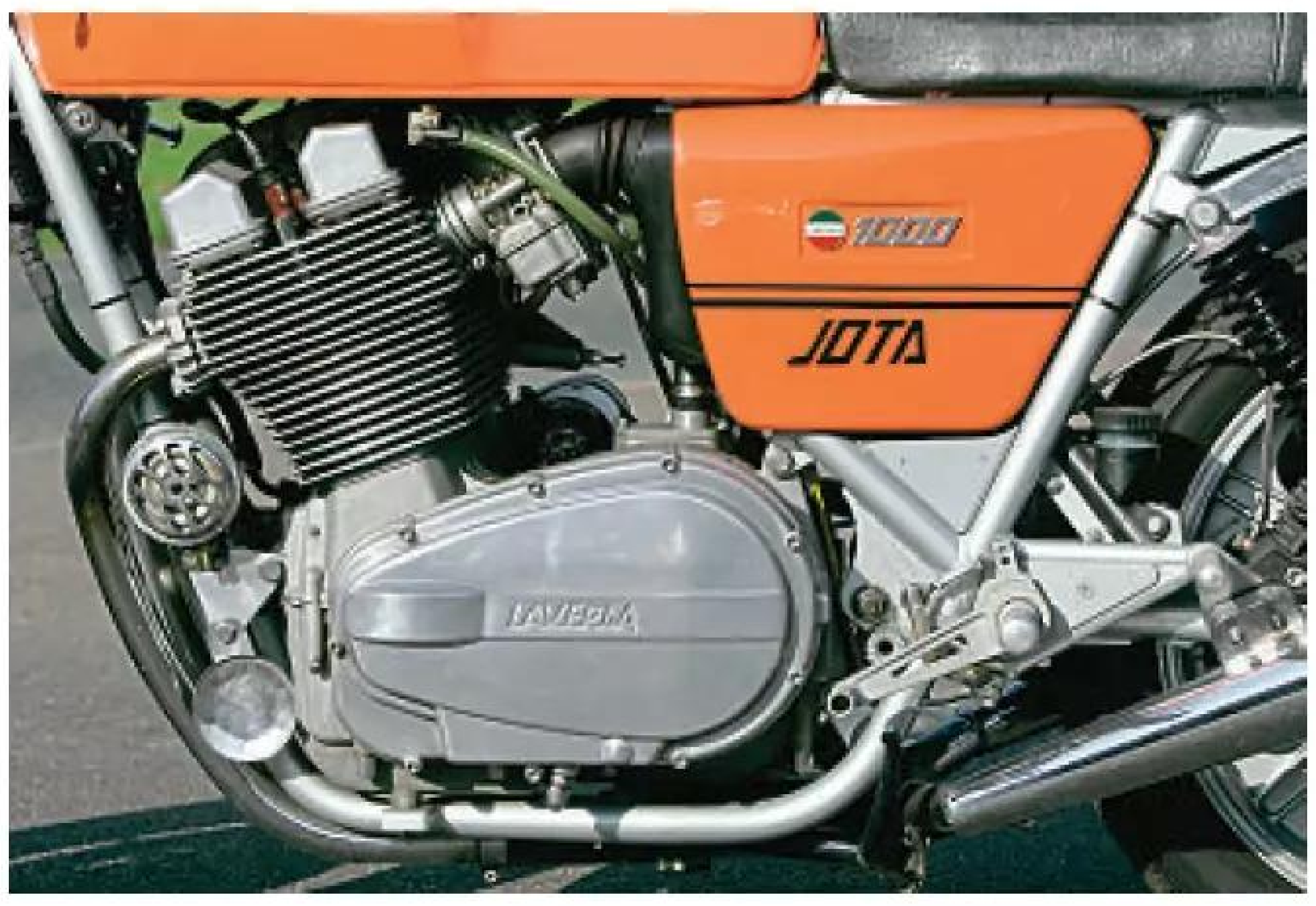
Words and photography thanks to Roland Brown

THE STORY THAT WAS TO BECOME THE Laverda Jota, that mighty Italian triple, began 50 years ago this summer – a bike many still revere as the fastest and finest superbike of the 1970s. It was very much a two-wheeled hero back then. Conceived by Slater Brothers, the Breganze firm's UK importer, the exotic 981cc triple was good for 140mph – giving it a strong claim to be the world's fastest superbike – and won three UK national production championships at the hands of ace rider Pete 'PK' Davies.

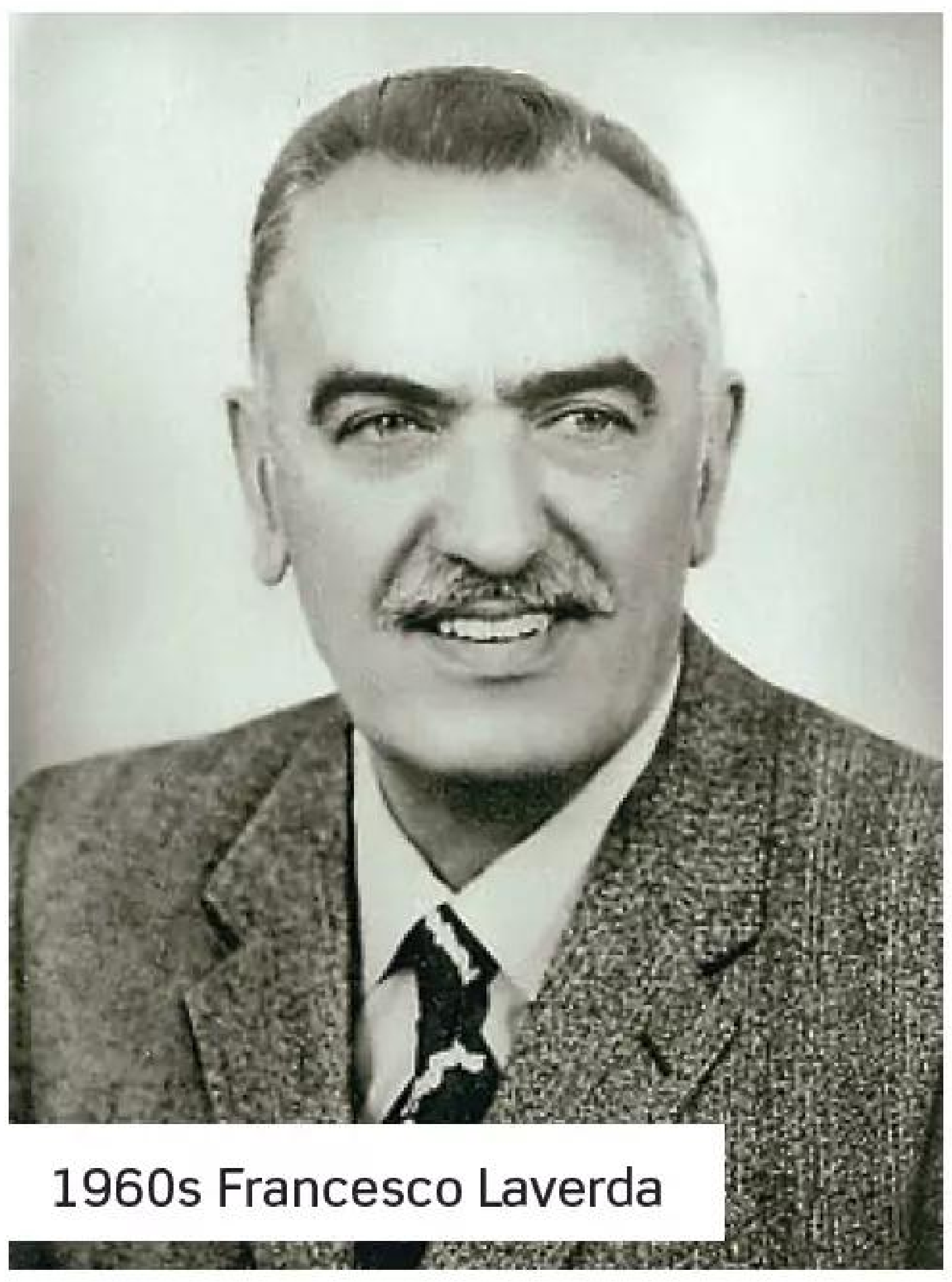
As a motorbike-mad Hertfordshire schoolkid in the mid-1970s, the rocket ship from northern Italy seemed to me as out of reach as an Apollo spacecraft. But by a series of coincidences, I'd eventually ride a succession of Jotas and get to know Richard Slater and PK Davies – all of which confirmed that meeting your heroes can be a very rewarding experience.

I was captivated by Laverda triples even before the Jota was born. There was nothing of two-wheeled interest near my hometown of Tring, until a guy named

1976 Laverda Jota



“Roland, your tyre’s flat!”



1960s Francesco Laverda

> **“As a motorbike-mad Hertfordshire schoolkid in the mid-1970s, the rocket ship from northern Italy seemed to me as out of reach as an Apollo spacecraft.”**

Chris Morphy opened a dealership named Morphy Motors in the nearby village of Long Marston, specialising in Italian exotica. While saving school holiday job pay towards a Yamaha FS1-E, I’d cycle over there and press my nose against the window to admire the gleaming metal from Ducati, Moto Guzzi and the lesser-known but equally glamorous Laverda.

The showroom rarely seemed to be open, but occasionally riders of these impossibly glamorous machines would thunder past my pushbike on the local roads. Morphy himself reputedly had connections at the Laverda factory, and a couple of times I saw him in town on a big blue triple, the original 3C.

Unknown to me, it was at about this time that the Jota was being hatched. Laverda had been producing the 3C, developed from its SF parallel twin family, for a couple of years. The barrel-chested DOHC triple’s blend of claimed 80bhp performance, stable handling and respectable reliability (once some early ignition problems were sorted) had already earned it a fine reputation.

1970s Massimo Laverda

The Slater brothers, Roger and Richard, had been dyno-tuning the 3C engine for racing, discovering that it was being strangled by the exhaust collector box. They’d designed a big-bore collector which, along with free-breathing silencers, boosted output substantially. They fitted a single seat and rearset footrests to make a model that they called the 3CE, the E standing for exhaust.

The Slaters had seen even more power after fitting factory endurance racing cams and high-compression pistons – 90bhp at 8500rpm on the venerable Heenan & Froude water brake dyno, on which the stock 3C had made less than 70bhp. Meanwhile, the factory had been working on an updated model to be called the 3CL, with cast wheels, disc brakes and a neat tailpiece. The ingredients for something special were in place.

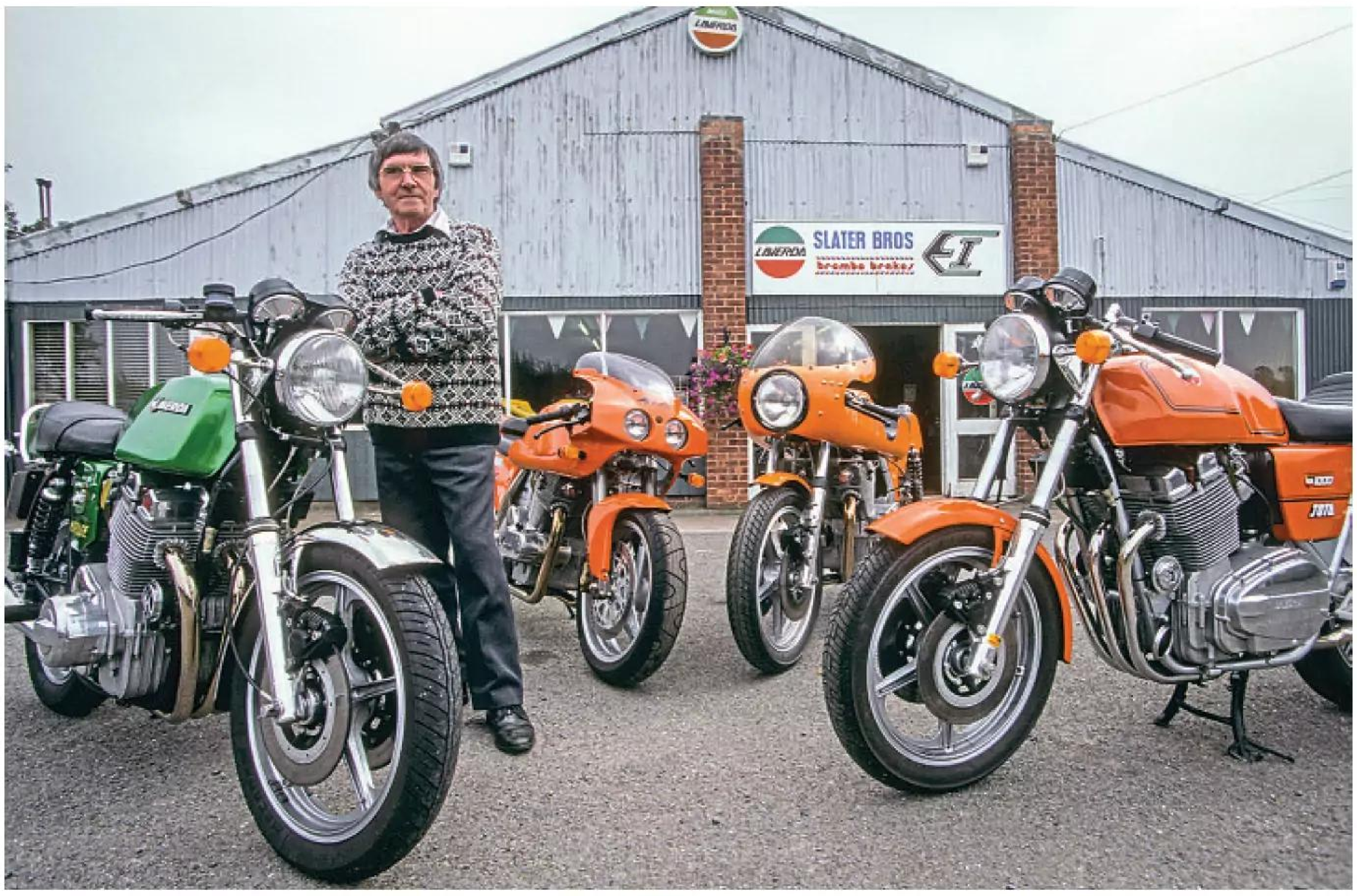
In August 1975, Roger Slater suggested the concept of a hotted-up triple at a meeting at the Breganze factory. “My opening gambit was that we needed to charge more money for the already pricey 3C,” he later recalled. “This went down like a lead balloon, so I followed up by presenting our power readings with the endurance cam, pistons and exhaust.

“I suggested the factory could supply some UK bikes built to our new specification.

➡

1990s Laverda factory

MOTO
LAVERDA


1997 Richard Slater, Slater Laverda

We would need a new colour scheme, and the bike must have an appropriate name. All the faces around the boardroom table viewed me with great suspicion."

After a lengthy pause, Massimo Laverda asked what the name of this model might be. Slater's response of Jota – "a Spanish gypsy dance in rapid triple time" – was received by roars of approving laughter, after which the group left for the traditional lengthy celebration lunch at the local Albergo Al Toresan.

Progress was rapid, and an initial batch of Jotas reached the UK in late December. The renowned Laverda dealer, tuner and racer Phil Todd, boss of Croydon-based Motodd, got his first bike built up on New Year's Eve. He became the first person in

"The secret, they revealed, was run it in quickly. Rev it hard, to more than 8000rpm, and change the valve springs mid-season because performance dropped off when they tired."

the country to ride one… and, later the same day, to crash one.

The Jota's fortunes soon improved dramatically, especially when Slaters went racing with the hard-riding Pete Davies. While I spent the famously long, hot summer of 1976 caning my newly acquired 'Fizzie,' Davies was muscling the Jota to capture the Avon-sponsored national production race championship after winning six out of seven rounds.

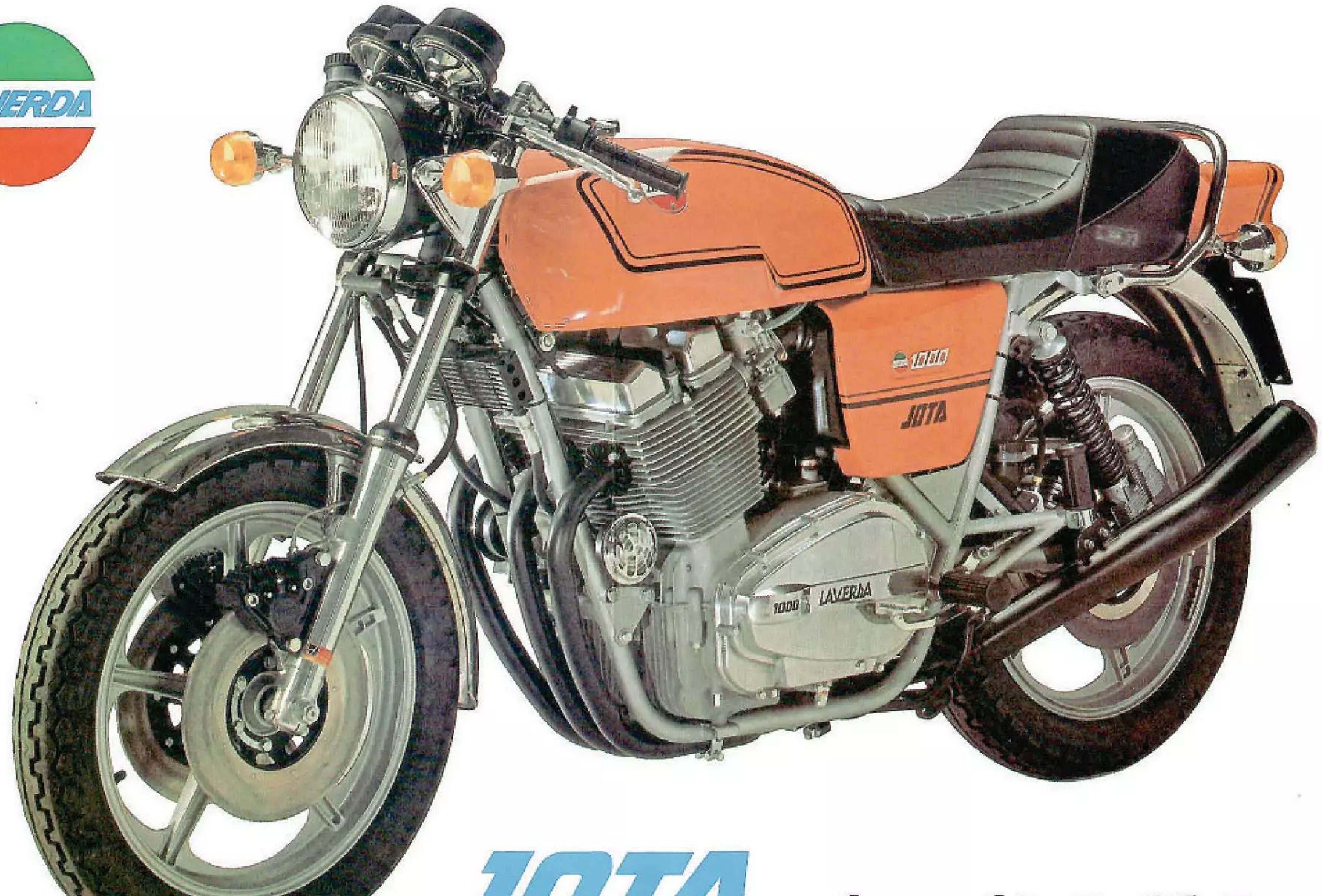
Some rivals suggested PK's Jota was illegally modified, but the Slaters insisted it was no different to all the rest. The secret, they revealed, was run it in quickly. Rev it hard, to more than 8000rpm, and change the valve springs mid-season because performance dropped off when they tired.

The Jota's reputation was further boosted by magazine coverage, especially that August in weekly paper *Motor Cycle*, whose tester John Nutting recorded 140.4mph at the MIRA proving ground near Hinckley. This was wind-assisted and one way only, but crucially made the triple faster than Kawasaki's Z1, and the first bike to top the one-forty mark.

Davies won two more national proddie titles in the next three seasons, losing out only in 1977 when he missed several rounds following two big crashes, one while leading a big Silverstone F1 race on a modified triple. He and the Jota were pictured on the January 1979 cover of *Bike*. In the feature inside, the "quiet, unassuming" PK reckoned the secret to riding the big, heavy triple was that you had to be the master of the situation.

"There are some bikes on which you can just sit there and open the throttle and let it go, but with the Jota you've got to grab hold of it and tell the bastard that it is going to go round the corner at this speed… Some people tend to feather the throttle a bit. They're not quite sure of the power and that sends the handling to pot… You've got to drive it into corners, get the power on as hard as you can, and then it handles a treat."

Slater Brothers polished the image with clever advertising, notably with the line 'Park the Jota, James' and an image of a sharp-suited rider outside the spectacular Chateau Impney – which, despite its exotic look and name, was a hotel in nearby ➡



JOTA - a legend in its lifetime

The legendary JOTA

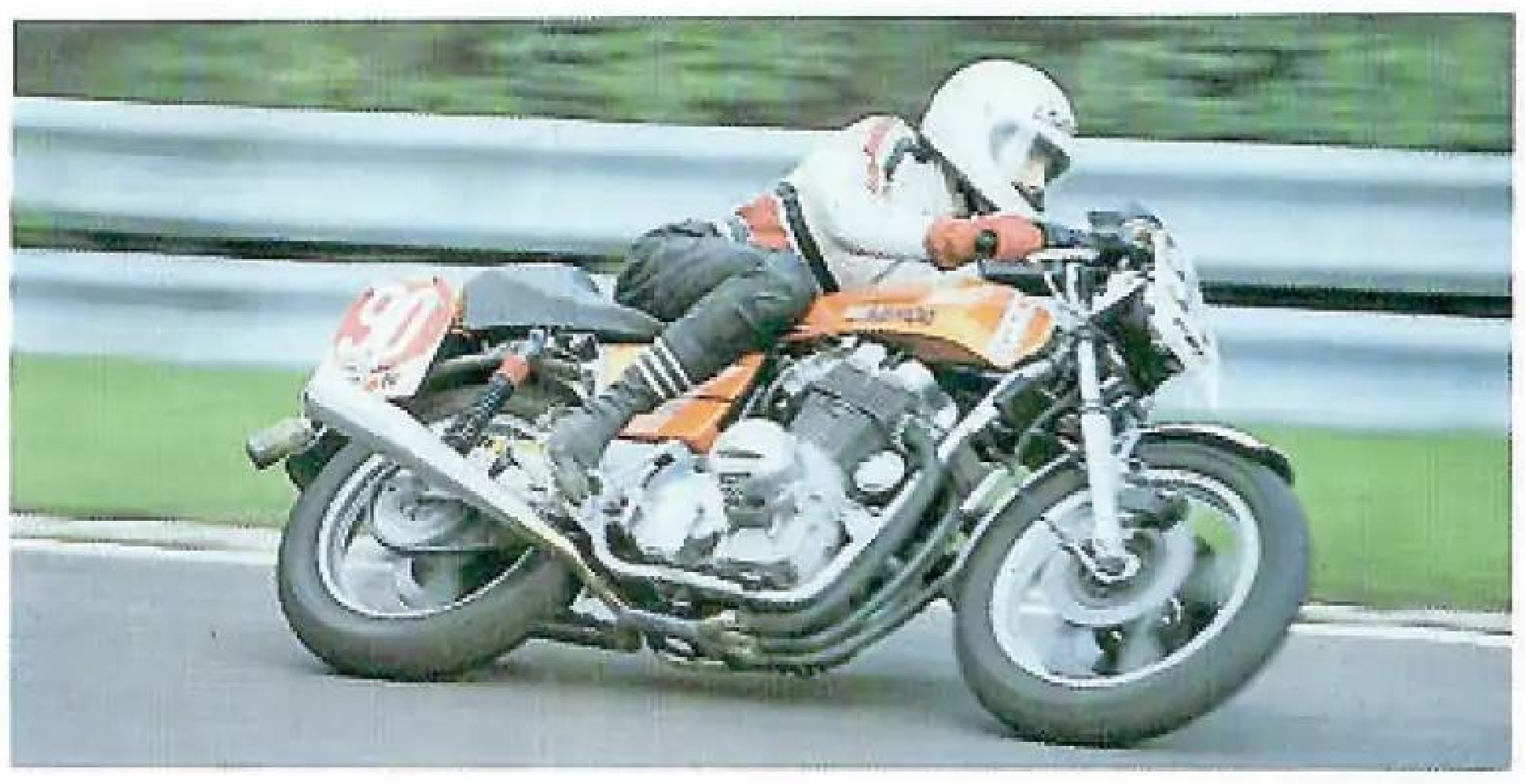


Photo: Richard Adams.

— to the world of motorcycling it is Laverda.
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A string of outstanding racing successes to its credit have made it truly a legend in its lifetime.
When Jota races — and wins — on the track, it is the same bike that the customer buys from the showroom floor. No 'bolt-on' bits, no expensive modifications.
At 140 mph in standard trim* it is still the fastest production road bike out of the crate. Or past the chequered flag.
JOTA. Real motorcyclists will remember it when all the others are forgotten.

** Electronically timed at the Motor Industry Research Association establishment, Nuneaton, at 140.04 mph by Motor Cycle magazine, August 1976.*
No other production road machine has yet been timed as fast.

JOTA BY LAVERDA

SPECIFICATION

Engine

Parallel three-cylinder four-stroke
Aluminium alloy barrels and head
DOHC
Bore & stroke .... 75 x 74mm
Capacity 981cc
Compression ratio 10:1
Specially designed exhaust system
Ignition .... BTZ/CDI electronic
Carburettors .... Three Dell'Orto type PHF 32mm
Electric starter

Transmission

Constant mesh 5-speed gearbox
Primary drive by Triplex chain
Final drive .... chain, ⅝ x ⅜ins
Clutch .... Multidisc in oil bath

Frame

Duplex cradle frame, 2½ins diameter spine

Suspension

Marzocchi hydraulic telefork and adjustable shock absorbers

Wheels

Laverda cast alloy
Tyres .... (front) 4.10 x 18ins
(rear) 4.25 x 18ins

Brakes

Brembo hydraulic, twin front and single rear discs .... diameter 280mm

Tank

Fuel capacity .... 4.28 Imp gall (19 litres)
incl. reserve 3 pints (1.7 lit)

Electrical System

Battery 12V 32ah
Generator .... 150 Watts

Specification subject to change without notice.

Sole British Concessionaires
SLATER BROS,
Collington, nr Bromyard,
Herefordshire HR7 4NB
Telephone: **08854 294/5**
Telex: **35482**

LAVERDA
1000
JOTA
LAVERDA

1985 SFC1000

LAVERDA
SFC 1000
SFC

Droitwich. The brochure bragged 'Jota – a legend in its lifetime' and quoted the 140.4mph top speed: "No other production road machine has yet been timed as fast."

But while the Jota ruled roads and race tracks through the late 1970s, Laverda was suffering setbacks, including the death of founder Francesco Laverda and his son Massimo, who'd taken over, suffering from a long-term illness. Mechanical problems, notably with main bearings and valve springs, also dented the triple's reputation for reliability.

Positive updates over time included new Marzocchi forks, revised seat, left-foot gearchange and optional half-fairing. Paintwork, which was red or green in 1976, changed to silver, then gold, then orange for three years from 1979. But progress from Japan was far more dramatic. By 1981, Suzuki's GSX1100 and Kawasaki's GPz1100 were making 100bhp and Honda had taken performance to a new level with the CB1100R.

Morphy Motors had closed by this time, and I was a journalism student with a ratty, production-raced Yamaha RD400C that had clip-on bars and no sidestand. After securing a fortnight's placement at *SuperBike*, I leant it against the office wall in Croydon while I sorted the magazine's post, made tea, and wrote a few short news stories I hoped would make into print.

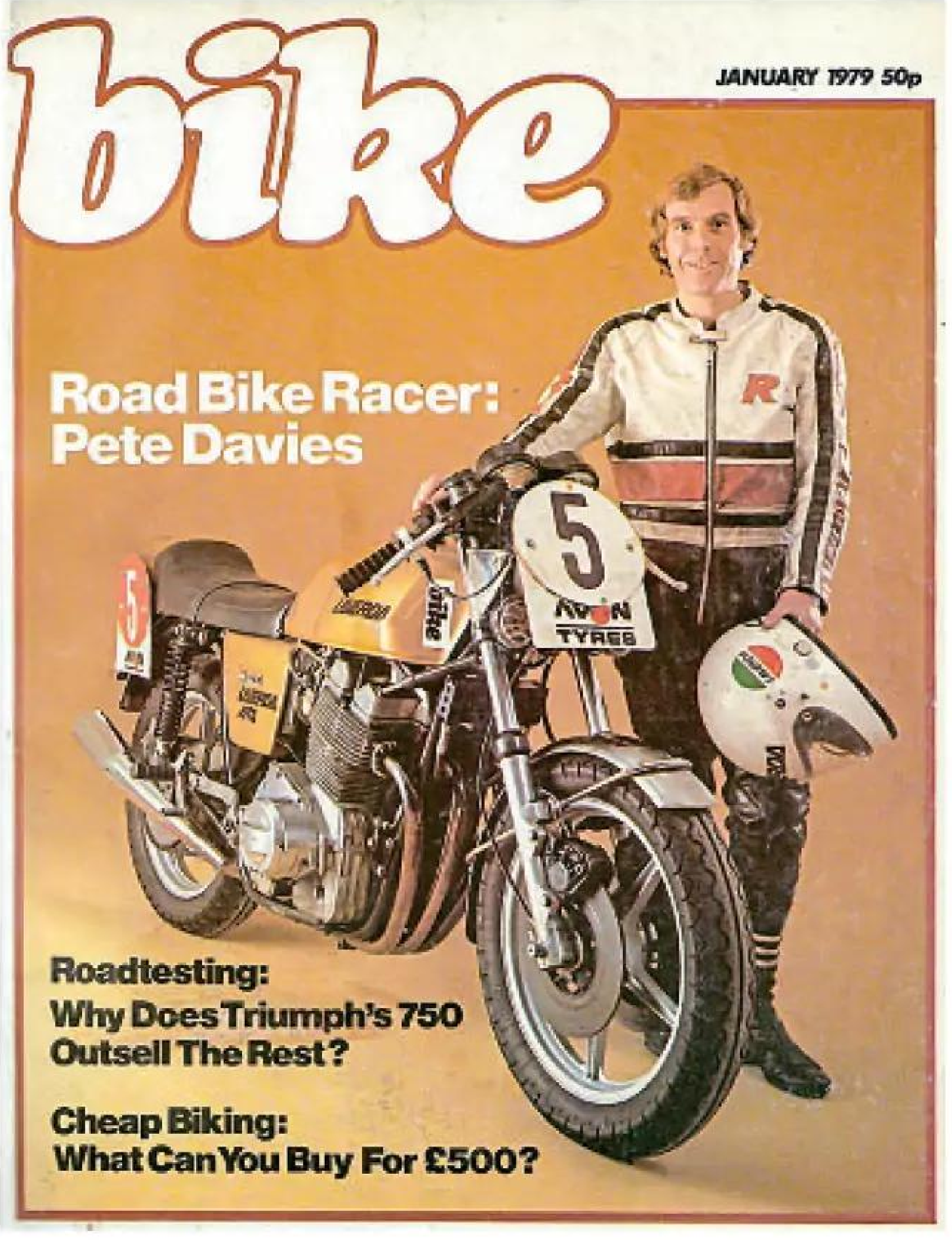
The editor was Mike Scott, these days the veteran editor of MotoGP bible *Motocourse*, and was back then a rapid road-tester who had raced a trick-framed Laverda Montjuic twin. One day he summoned me to his office, told me the magazine was due to collect a Jota test bike from Slater Brothers… and asked if I'd like to take the train to its base near Bromyard, Herefordshire, and ride it back.

Feeling about as qualified to ride it as to pilot Apollo 18, I obviously bit his hand off. My excitement was not damped by the following day's downpour. Thankfully, I managed to splash back on the newly half-faired orange triple with only a couple of hairy slides. Mike requested a short story, which was published a couple of months later and became my first ever bike test.

"The Jota's demanding character, occasional niggles and lack of comfort prevent it from being an ideal all-purpose iron," I concluded in period fashion.

➡

FIELDSHEER
Arai
LAVERDA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JANUARY 1979 50p
Road Bike Racer:
Pete Davies
Roadtesting:
Why Does Triumph's 750
Outsell The Rest?
Cheap Biking:
What Can You Buy For £500?

1979 Bike magazine's January cover

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vs HONDA VF1000F
vs BMW K100RS
vs KAWASAKI GPz900R
vs YAMAHA FJ1100
on Britain's Fastest Roads
RADICAL SLICK
Riding the 160mph Feet First Thirteen

Bike magazine from 1984

> ***"In another sign of the times, the front cover featured a Laverda and a well-built blonde wearing an unzipped leather jacket and not much else."***

"But hit the open road and you'll find out what this bike is all about. When you're out there getting it on, you will forget the aches because you'll be too busy enjoying the ride and trying to tame the beast." In another sign of the times, the front cover featured a Laverda and a well-built blonde wearing an unzipped leather jacket and not much else.

That Jota experience presumably helped me land the staff writer's job at rival *Bike* in early 1982. And by curious coincidence, the first bike I tested for the magazine was Laverda's latest, the 120 Jota, a revamped version of the legendary – if no longer all-conquering – triple, now with a 120-degree crankshaft instead of the old 180-degree layout.

Charging around on the notably smoother-running Jota for a fortnight was a huge thrill, one of the highlights being my first chance to experience speed-testing at the fabled MIRA – in reality, a windswept,

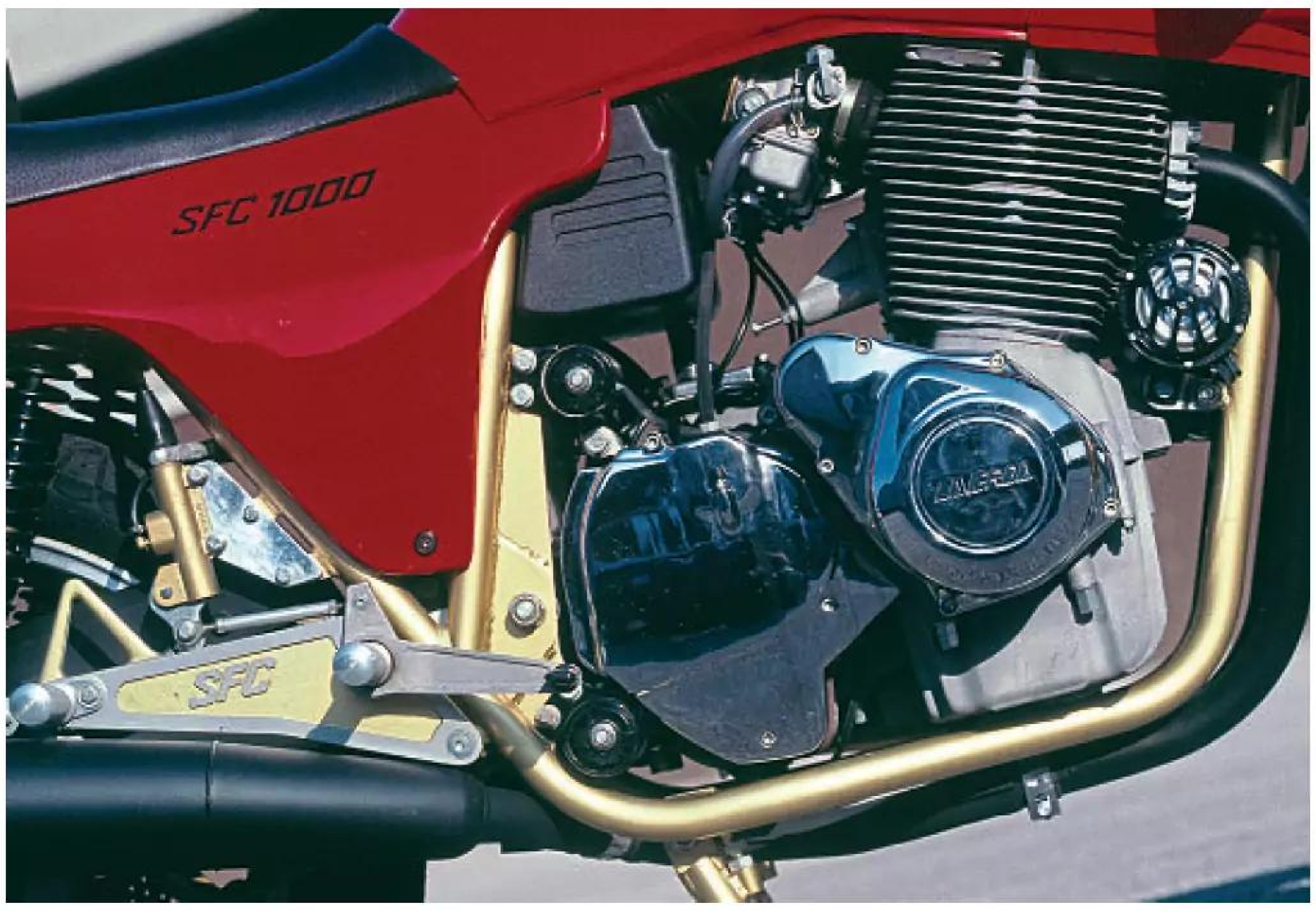
Stars align for 50th birthday bash

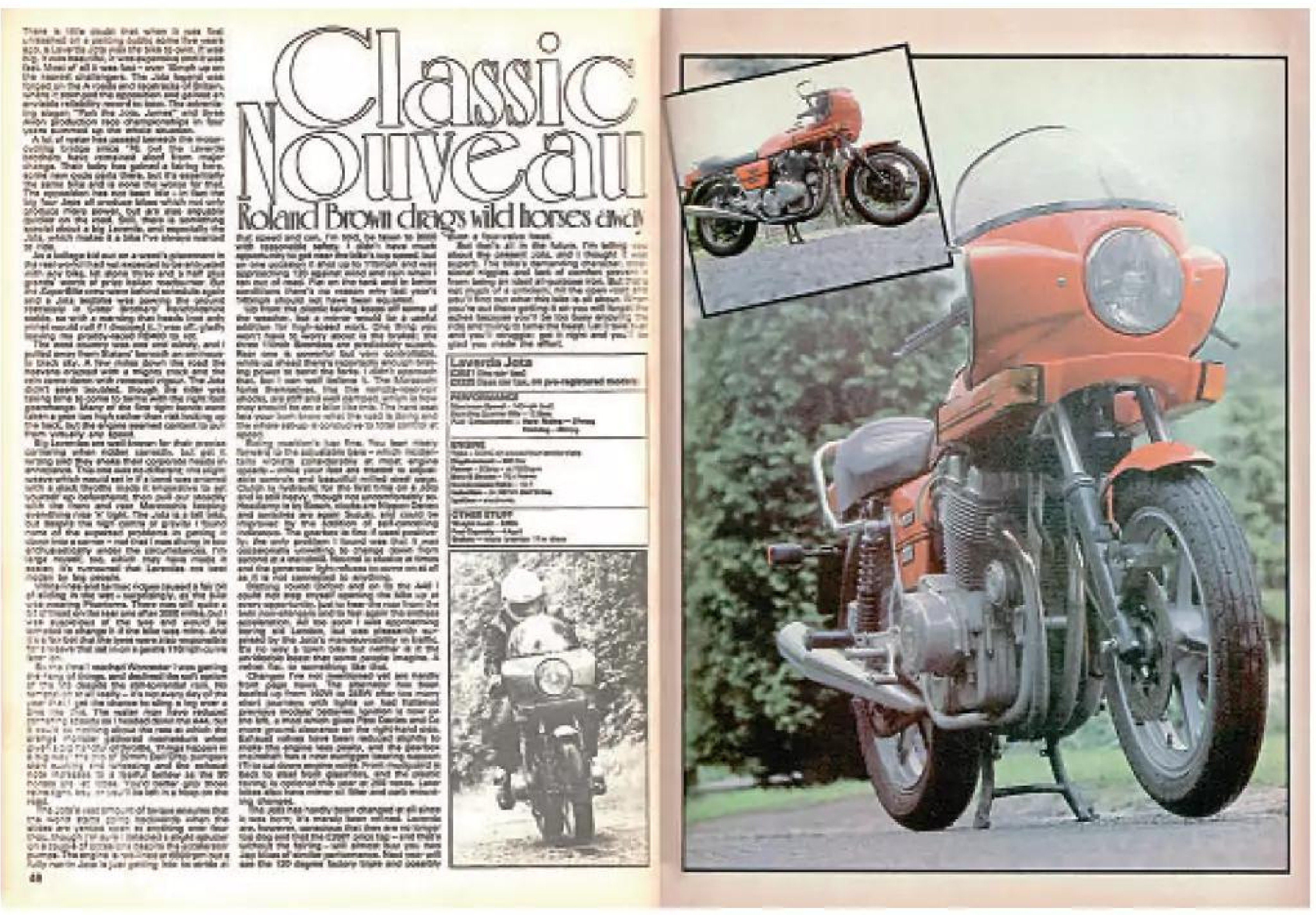
Laverda owners reading this magazine hot off the press or promptly downloaded have just enough time to join the Jota's 50th anniversary celebration, taking place in the Cotswolds on Sunday, August 3. The gathering is likely to attract more than 250 Laverdas, the majority of them triples, as well as many of the key people involved in the Jota story.

"We'll have a line-up of a Jota of each colour and year, plus specials including the Cropredy Liberator," said Malcolm Cox, long-time Laverda enthusiast and tuner, who is organising the event. "Roger Slater and Pete Davies both live in the States and are flying over to be there."

Richard Slater, Phil Todd and former Laverda dealer and racer Roger Winterburn will also be coming, but the gathering is likely to be the last of its type. "The people who were involved with the Jota in the 1970s are all getting pretty old now – Roger Slater is 89," said Cox. "There won't be another event like this."

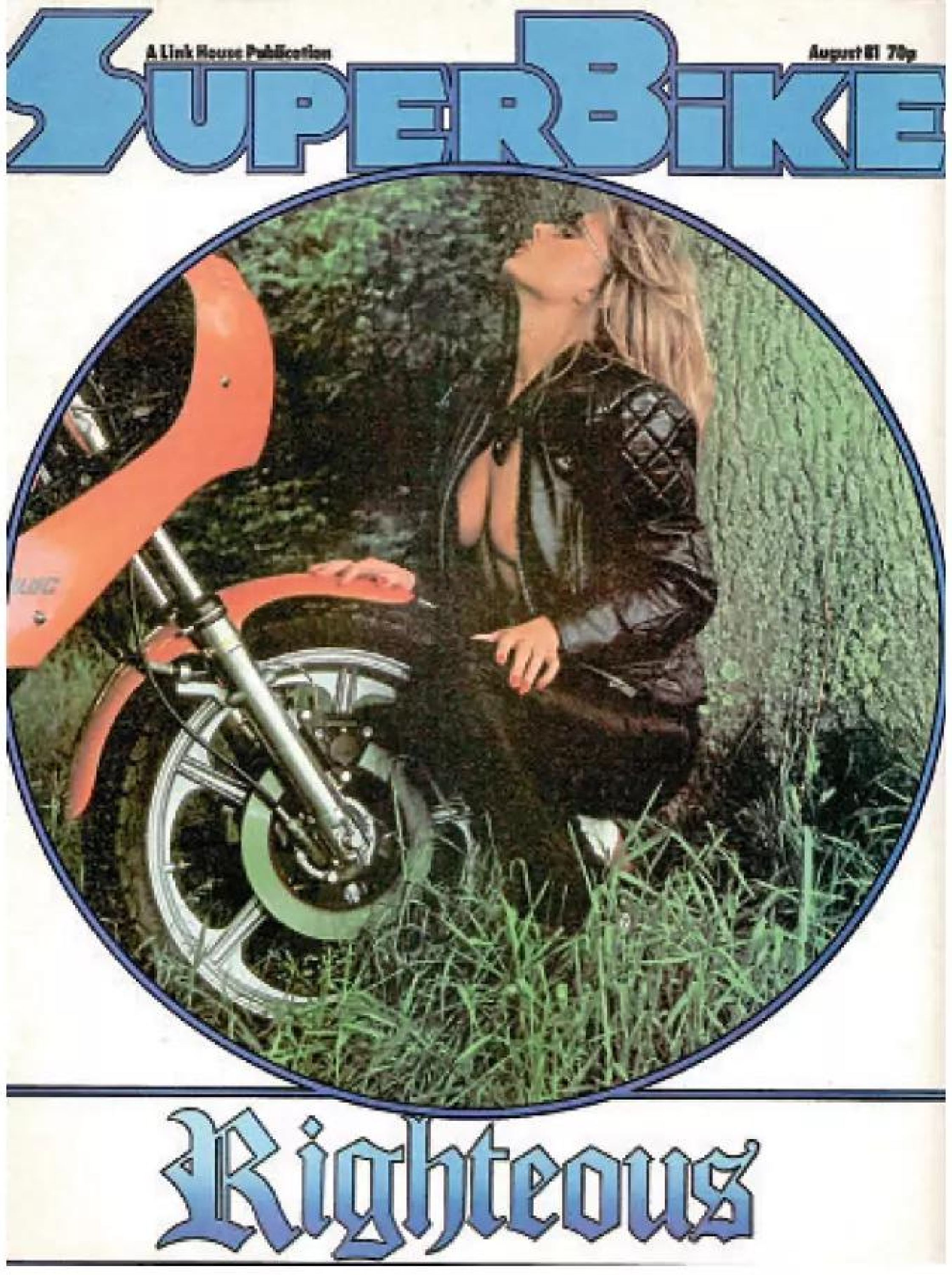
It is aimed at Laverda owners, and attendance is by invitation only to prevent the venue in Willersey from being over-run. If you're interested in attending, contact Malcolm Cox at coxeng@gmx.com




Classic Nouveau

Roland Brown drags wild horses away

Laverda Jota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August 81 70p

SuperBike

Righteous

1981 SuperBike magazine's August cover

outdated facility ill-suited to motorbikes. The mile-long straight ended with timing lights, followed by a stretch of tarmac – by this time worryingly short, for the fastest bikes – and then a gravel trap.

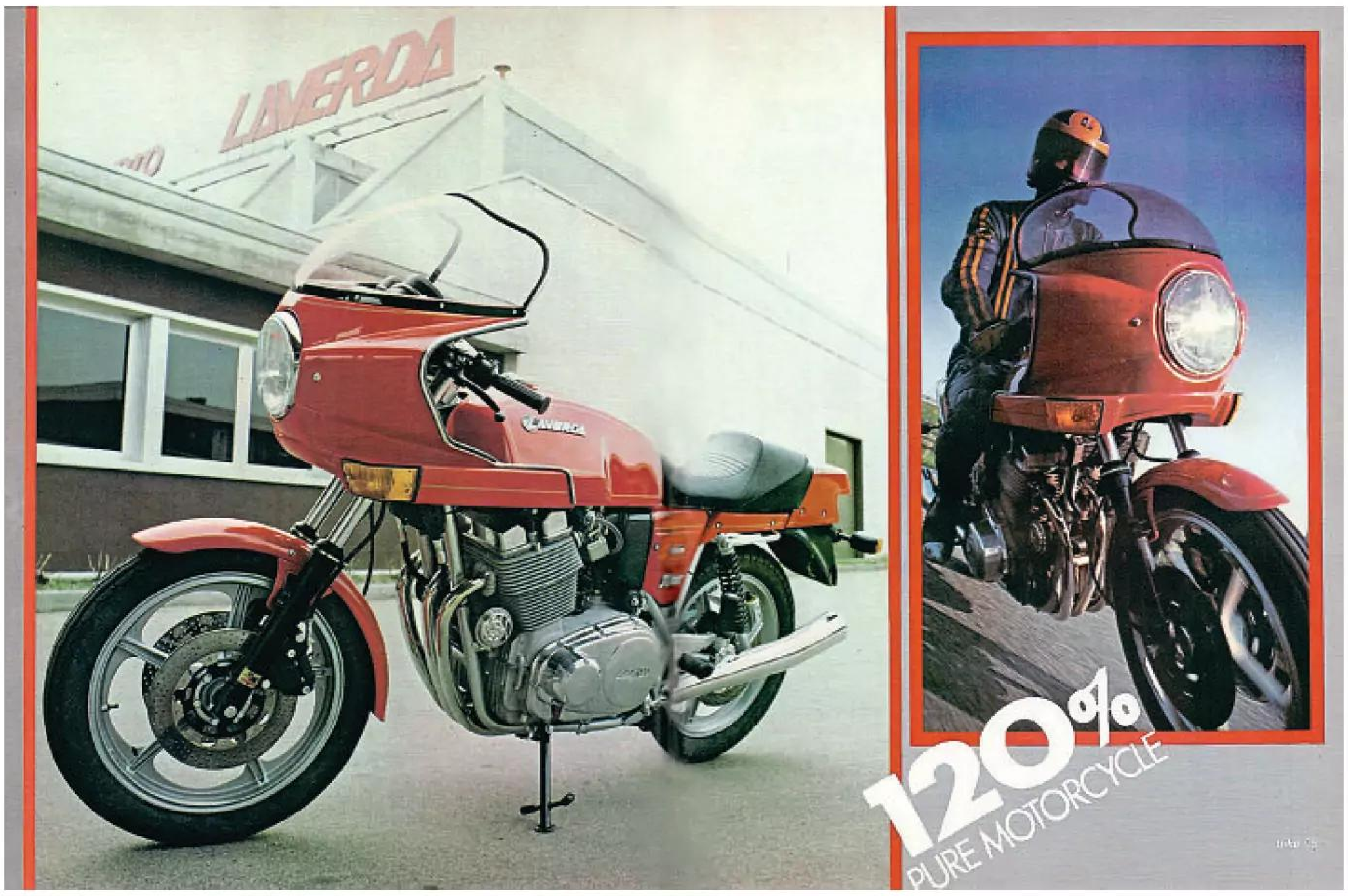
The top speed we quoted with my June '82 test was a suspiciously rounded 135mph, possibly because the timing lights had failed, which they often did. I don't remember the reason, but I do vividly recall going through the lights with head down and throttle open, then sitting up and grabbing the front brake lever – at which point the Pirelli Phantom squealed and the 'bars snapped right, hitting the lock-stop with a bang. I released the lever just in time, braked again, and just about stopped before the gravel, riding back with the adjustable 'Jota bars' distinctly off-centre.

I was keen to get dramatic pics on the photo session, as was my new boss, editor Dave Calderwood, who turned up at my favourite roundabout near Tring with a promising photographer he wanted to try out. I rode round until I'd worn a hole in the right knee of my Levi's, followed by one in the bike's engine cover – ground clearance was never a Jota strength – which ended the session.

We cured the leak with Araldite, but the snapper turned out to be hopeless, so we had to try again a few days later – this time with Dave shooting out of the back of a car, while I followed, bolt upright in ill-matching blue leathers. The pics were dull but at least useable, and the Laverda was still running well when I returned it to new importer Three Cross Motorcycles in Dorset.

Sadly, that couldn't be said of the next Jota that I tested for *Bike,* in 1984. This was the last model with that famous old name. It was a variant of the restyled, more refined but still air-cooled RGS and RGA triples that Laverda had

➡



recently introduced, complete with a twin-headlamp half-fairing made from a bendable plastic called Bayflex.

The competition was hot: our five-way giant test in the Isle of Man included Kawasaki's new liquid-cooled GPZ900R and Yamaha's FJ1100. Three Cross had done its best to get it up to speed, fitting the still 981cc engine with a tuning kit and baffle-free race pipe. The triple was sleek, loud, and bursting with character.

But the Jota started running roughly even before we reached the Island, where it only managed a couple of TT circuit laps before dropping a valve and had to be trailered back to Dorset. Three Cross boss Keith Davies accused me of blowing it up by pulling wheelies, which I hadn't. Guess the tuning mods had simply been a step too far.

The following year I tested the final derivative, the SFC1000, which was stylish and charismatic – but a dinosaur alongside the likes of Suzuki's new GSX-R750. The Japanese manufacturers' pace of development in the mid-1980s has arguably not been matched before or since. Laverda could not possibly keep up and did not survive the decade.

My own Jota experience hadn't quite ended, though. By this time I'd traded my RD400C for a GSX1100 and was friends with racing rivals including Vince Field, a seriously quick Brummie who would become National Production champion. Vince was being helped out by a softly-spoken ex-racer who turned out to be none other than PK Davies – and this long-time fan was thrilled to meet him.

Through club racing I'd also got to know Steve Elliott, an amiable Laverda fanatic who had enjoyed taking on the Japanese bikes on his SFC750 twin. Steve later formed a firm called Palmelli with a friend, to build revamped versions of the SFC, which had become a cult model with prices to match. In the mid-1990s, the duo branched out to offer 'new' triples, combining reconditioned original bikes with many new parts to produce machines as close as possible to showroom condition.

Palmelli's Jota, which they sold through Slater Brothers, was typically a late-model naked, 180-degree triple, with orange paintwork and silver frame, though any variant or colour could be ordered. Options included lower-compression 3CL pistons, better suited to modern fuel; a superior Motodd ignition; and a modified clutch that meant you no longer had to be able to crack walnuts with your left hand to ride in traffic.

This visually standard but subtly improved Jota was quick, well sorted and fun to ride – arguably better than any ever assembled in Breganze. Almost two decades after I'd set off on my first ever road test, it was a treat to meet Richard Slater again and ride a rorty triple away from his Herefordshire base (brother Roger had emigrated to the States years before).

Another 20-plus years down the line, Richard has closed Slater Brothers and retired, and the Jota is ancient history. Laverda, which around the turn of the century briefly seemed set for revival under Aprilia's ownership, has faded from the scene. Many current motorcyclists have barely even heard of the marque.

But nobody who lived and breathed motorbikes in Laverda's late-1970s glory days – even those of us with noses pressed against a showroom window – will forget the mighty triple. Forged in Breganze and finished in Bromyard, the Jota was among the brightest stars of a golden age for motorcycling. Half a century after its conception, it still epitomises what a fast, loud, exhilarating Italian superbike should be. **CBG**

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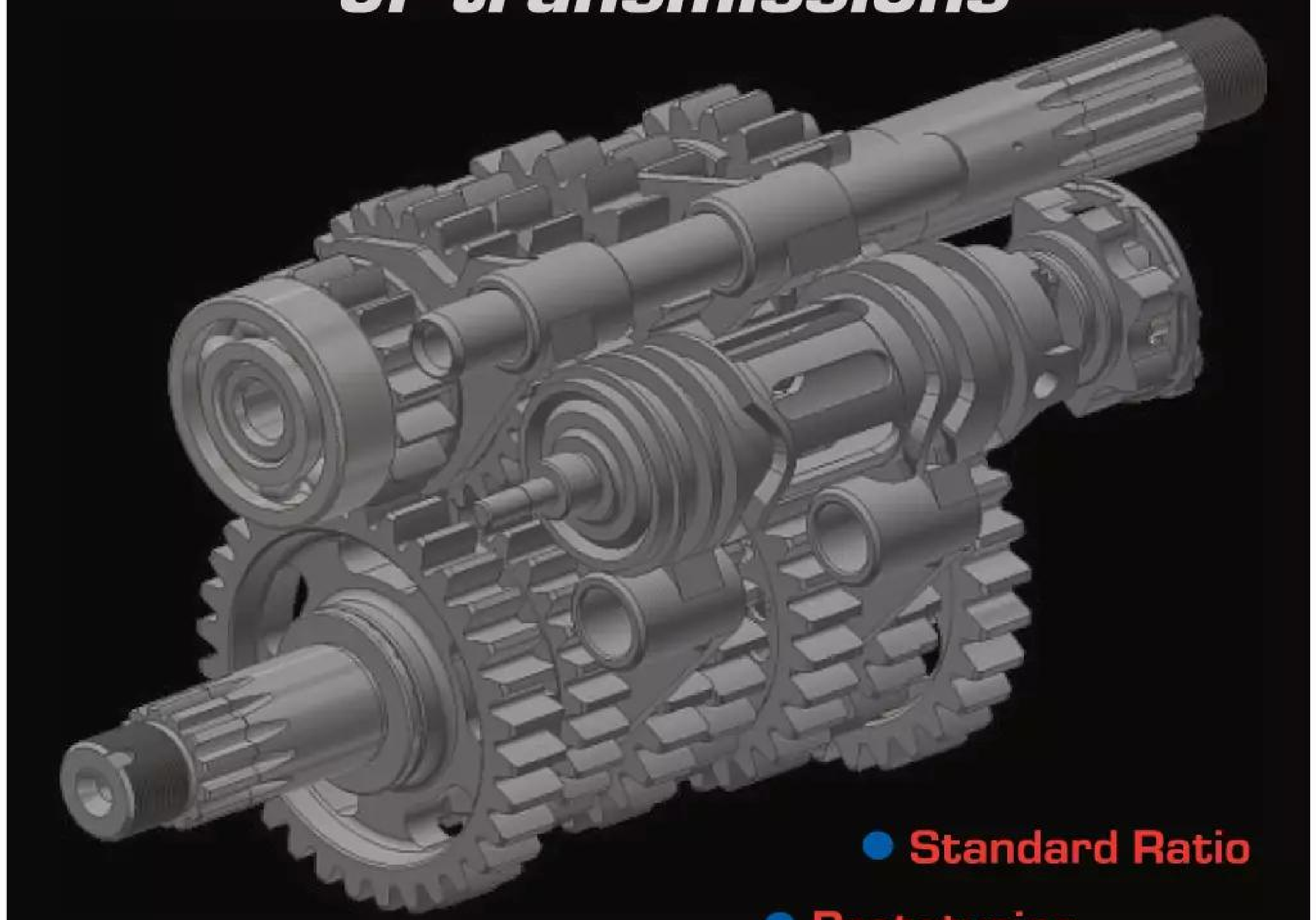

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Ring-a-ding! Suzuki GT250 X7

The 100mph learner bike was so fast they changed the law – and they still make great, fun bikes.

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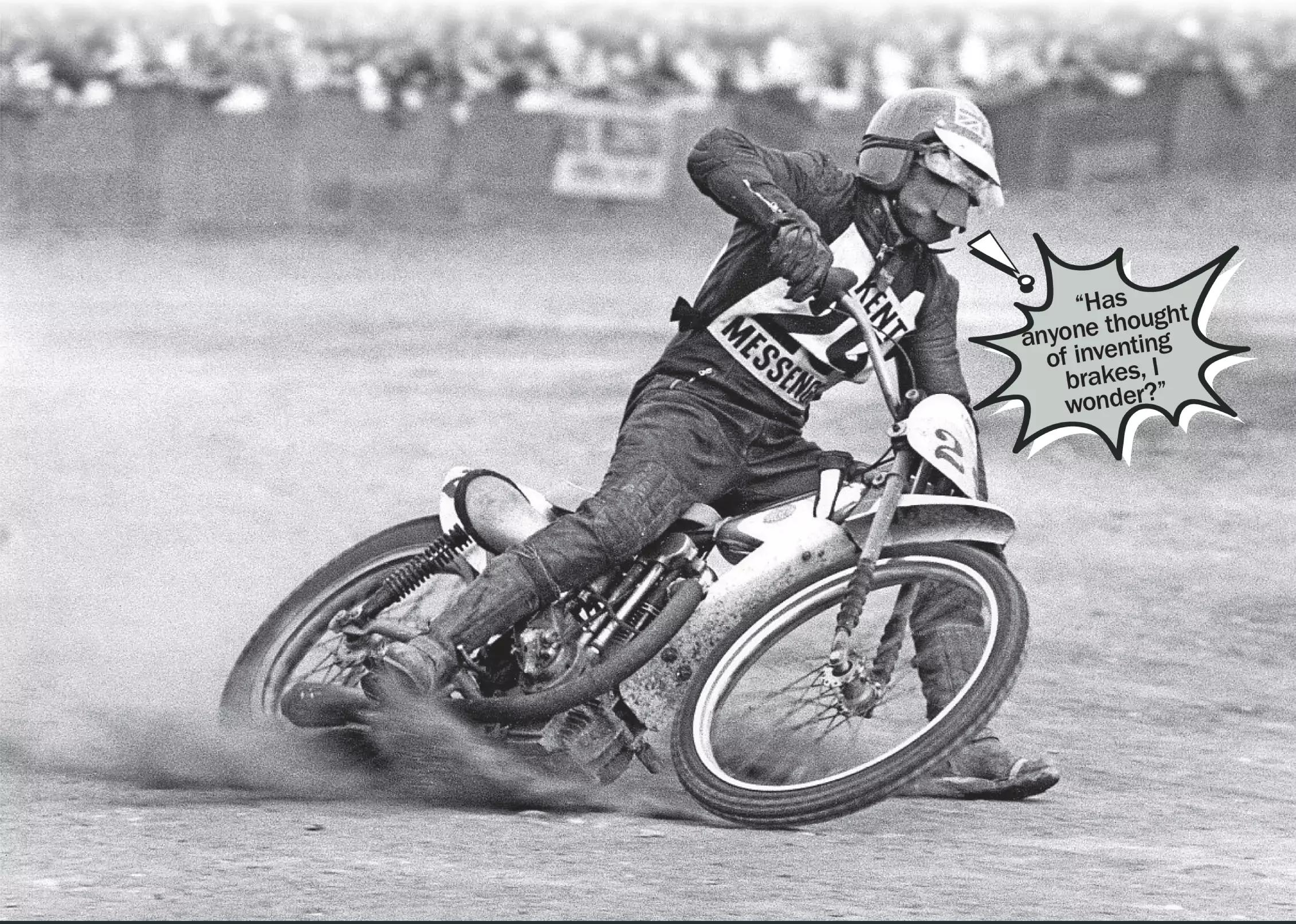
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"Has anyone thought of inventing brakes, I wonder?"

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Triumph single gets dirty

Triumph's latest scrambler is a real retro off-roader

A new version of Triumph's extremely popular 400cc single has been launched with more authentic off-road spec than the previous Scrambler.

The 400 XC Scrambler addresses issues that buyers looking for a bike with more off-road potential for adventure riding had been looking for, with one version in a paint scheme that apes a classic Triumph off-roader of the late 1970s.

The Scrambler 400 XC features side-laced aluminium rimmed spoked wheels rather than heavier alloys, which can take tubeless tyres and a 19in front wheel will help in the dirt. Suspension has been given an upgrade with 43mm diameter big-piston upside-down front forks and rear piggy-back monoshock with 150mm travel each, switchable traction control and a dedicated off-road ABS mode. The instruments feature a large analogue speedometer and an integrated LCD screen with a digital tachometer, a fuel gauge and gear indicator, all accessed via a handlebar-mounted scroll button. A USB-C charging socket allows on-the-move charging of handlebar-mounted devices, such as smartphones and navigation systems. Lights and indicators are tucked in. Both Scrambler 400 models come equipped with a steering lock and an anti-theft immobiliser as standard. A transponder chip integrated into the ignition key ensures only the owner can start the engine. While several paint schemes are available, the most striking is a yellow and black finish which harks back to the 750cc Tiger Trail, produced at Meriden in the late 1970s.

The Scrambler 400 XC will be available in a choice of three colours – racing yellow, storm grey and vanilla white – from September 2025, priced from £6545.

Naked twins from Suzuki

Suzuki's new twins

Suzuki has moved into the naked retro big twin market with the launch of two brand-new models. The GSX-8T and GSX-8TT are said to combine “retro spirit with next-generation performance.” The 8T adopts a new round headlight with full LED lighting, while the 8TT adds a headlight cowling/nose fairing that shares more than a passing resemblance to vintage road race machinery from the 1970s and 1980s.

Suzuki say the styling is inspired by classic bikes of the 1960s and 1970s, such as the iconic Suzuki T500, while the 8TT builds on that platform further but with inspiration coming from the faired race bikes of the period, such as the legendary Yoshimura GS1000 AMA superbike, though some might suggest the nose fairing looks more GPz than GS. Both models use the 776cc parallel twin engine from Suzuki's V-Strom, with a 270-degree crankshaft double overhead cams and four valves per cylinder. The engine is housed in a twin-spar steel frame with a separate lightweight subframe. Both the 8T and 8TT get a new fuel tank, seat and seat unit, and the handlebars come with bar-end mirrors.

The big twin weighs in at 203kg, only slightly more than the T500 that inspired it, and 20kg lighter than a 1970s GS750. It has a 32in seat height, and the twin produces about 80bhp. With modern additions such as an electronics suite comprising traction control, power modes, a bi-directional quickshifter and clutch assist, the 8T promises to be easier to hustle along than either of its predecessors.

The 8T costs £9599 and the 8TT £9999 and are in showrooms now.

Norton goes Hedon

Heritage colours for Norton's helmet

Deep-pocketed Norton owners can now shell out on a new high-spec, high-tech helmet to go with their ride. Norton has launched a new Norton helmet collection in partnership with top-end helmet maker Hedon.

The two helmets are both full-face, one with a glass fibre shell and the other carbon fibre. The glass fibre colour scheme follows the classic Norton racing colour scheme from the 1960s. Both helmets have black leather lining/trim and Hed Armour lining with 360-degree cushion padding. The helmets in the collection will also feature Quin, a digital medical ID embedded with an NFC (near field communication) chip, allowing seamless sharing of critical health and emergency information. In the event of an incident, a bystander or first responder can scan the QuinTag using their phone to retrieve your designated emergency information and alert your contacts. The collection is currently available for UK and EU Norton customers, priced at £849 and £899.

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Gloucestershire Vintage Extravaganza hits 50

A fine line up of classics Photo John Rogers

The Gloucestershire Vintage & Country Extravaganza is the ultimate summer destination for the old vehicle fan, and it is set to return in grand style to celebrate its 50th anniversary. Taking place on August 1-3 at South Cerney Airfield, near Cirencester, the landmark event promises its most spectacular line-up yet, featuring thousands of exhibits, three live arenas, and a rich variety of countryside attractions. Hosted by the Stroud Vintage Transport & Engine Club, visitors can enjoy a nostalgic celebration of transport history, countryside traditions, and all things vintage. Rally Chairman Martyn Slater said: “The extravaganza has been a staple in the vintage rally calendar since the 1970s. While it has evolved, our mission remains to inform, educate and entertain, celebrating the UK’s unique transport heritage, while creating a joyful experience for all ages.”

Recognised as one of the UK’s leading heritage vehicle festivals, as well as a sizable selection of classic motorcycles, the event showcases an extraordinary variety of vintage transport including steam engines, classic cars, military transport, vintage commercials, trucks, historic buses, tractors and vintage caravans. There’s also live music, retro fashion shows and interactive vintage entertainment. The popular animal and countryside arena also returns this year, featuring a charity dog show, falconry demonstrations, rare breeds, and rural skills displays. Advance tickets are available at **glosvintageextravaganza.ticketsrv.co.uk**

The return of Electra

Norton’s parent company, TVS, which announced in the spring that it planned to launch six new machines over the next few years with the famous British name on the tank, have registered two new names in India for use on future models.

TVS has been rumoured to be planning a new 450cc adventure bike, and it already owns the Nomad name, last used on a Norton/Matchless hybrid in the 1960s, and Atlas, the name given to the 750cc Featherbed framed twin.

Combat, the name given to the ill-fated high performance early 1970s Commando engine, and Electra, from the company’s revolutionary early 1960s electric start ES400 twin, have now been added to that list. Beyond the names, however, there is little information. However, it has given us the opportunity to print a picture of a Norton Electra (courtesy of Bonhams) which, we suspect, the new bike will not look like.

Calne Bike Meet under threat

Thousands line the streets of Calne

One of the UK’s biggest bike gatherings, the Calne Bike Meet, celebrated its 25th birthday as this month’s CBG hit the newsagents. But the Wiltshire event is now under threat after a decision by the local council to cut the event’s grant. The bike day attracts thousands of riders, raises more than £10,000 for charity, and puts an estimated £500,000 into the coffers of the Wiltshire town’s businesses. But a trio of councillors declared that instead of giving money to charities, the event organisers should give that money to the council to pay for medical cover, insurances and licences. Other councillors agreed to cut that from the grant funding. The remaining funding was provided on condition that the Friends of Calne Bike Meet present a three-year plan of how it can become a self-sustaining event; the meet organisers now face a £3000 shortfall. Organisers told local news outlet *Calne News* that the decision demonstrates a total lack of understanding of how the meet works. The grant enables them to run the event safely, which in turn enables them to give back about £500,000 to the town in revenue to a range of businesses and roughly £10,000 to local and national charities. Calne Bike Meet began in 2000, organised by the Calne Rotary Club and local motorcycle enthusiasts to bring together motorcyclists and the wider community.

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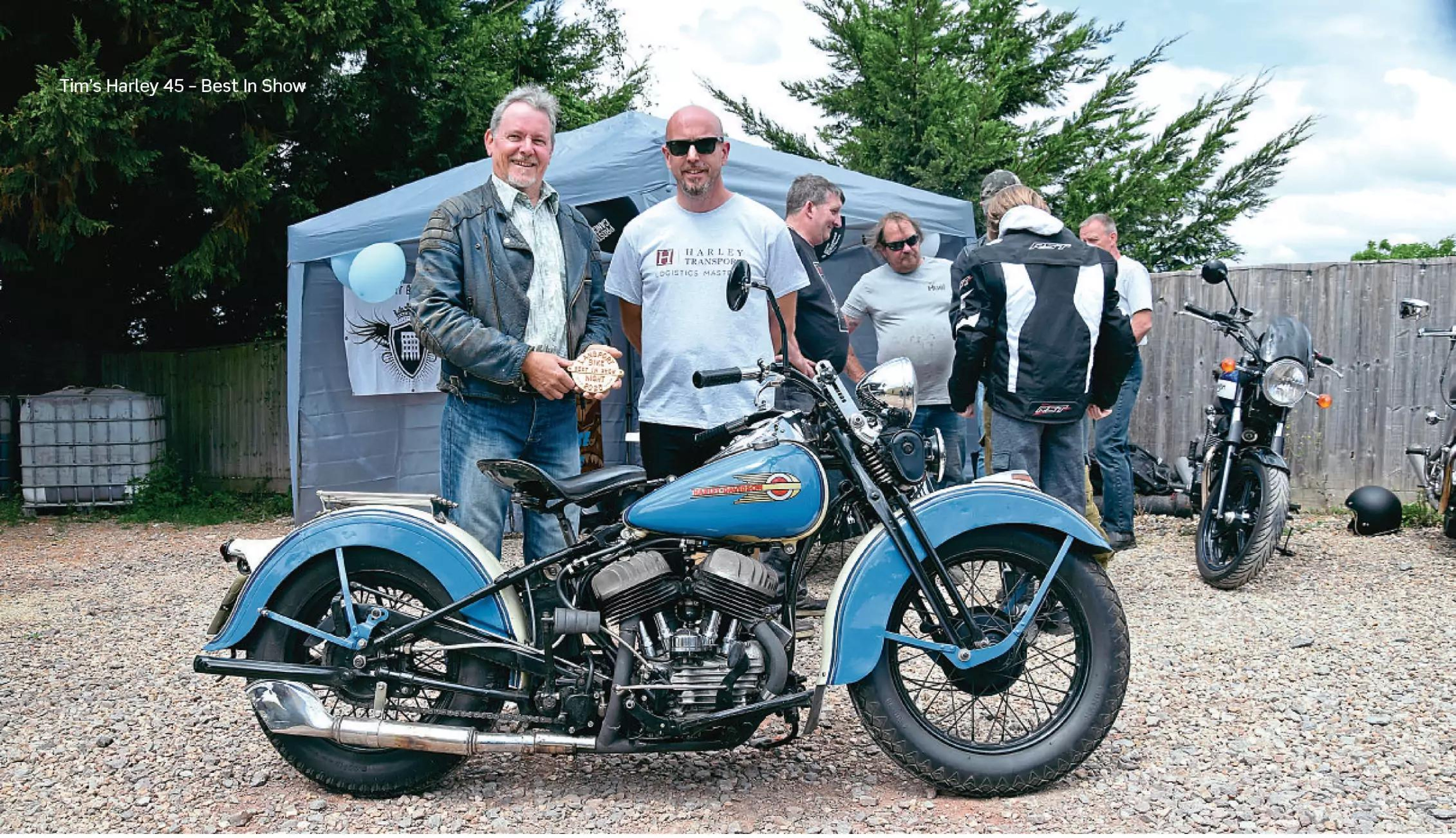
Tim's Harley 45 – Best In Show

We've been to
Langport Bike Show

Pictures by Oli Hulme and Nelson Ryall

WHY NOT ORGANISE A BIKE show? I mean, how hard can it be? Especially when you have founded a bike night that attracts an eclectic mix of impressive classic and unusual motorcycles. Maybe for an appropriate charity?

Many gatherings and bike shows have fallen by the wayside, not least because local authorities have constantly heaped more and more regulations, fees and controls on a diminishing number of willing organisers to the point that simply borrowing a marquee and putting it up in a field has become a massively onerous task involving months of paperwork.

There are ways to get round this, like making it a one-day affair, avoiding the issue of overnight stays. Don't bother with traders, and it will help when you have a venue with a big car park. Langport Bike Night had just this, in the headquarters of the Bere Cider Company in Somerset, where the weekly summer bike night is hugely popular.

Nelson, the organiser of the gathering, picked a weekend in July that wasn't snapped up by something else and got to work. He picked a charity, Prostate Cancer UK, and persuaded ace metal-manipulating wizard Jonny to cast some trophies from magnesium. Nelson then spent most of the spring getting the word out. It was free to attend, which solved more problems emanating from 'The Man,' and there were no admission rules. If you turned up on a bike, you were in the show, like it or not.

The week before, the Met Office published dire warnings of thunderstorms and plagues of frogs, which may have put some off, but after an initially nervous start for Nelson and his tiny team (the team itself being tiny, not the members), bikes flooded in.

The first were a Norton Commando, a Moto Guzzi V35, a 1914 Triumph Model H and a Yamaha YZF R1 Streetfighter. And then they all came. A gorgeous orange Honda CB550, a feast of Italiana including a pair of Ducati Darmahs, one coming from Malmesbury, a Laverda of great beauty, and a wonderful Moto Guzzi Super Alce. There were Triumphs and Velocettes, shiny 1970s and 1980s Japanese sportsbikes, both restored and modified, an immaculate MZ ES150, and Harleys and choppers and lowriders by the score. A huge six-cylinder Honda F6C rubbed shoulders with a modded Yamaha PW50, there were BSA twins, and a plunger framed Ariel VHA.

An early arrival gets some running advice for his newly acquired Commando

There were seven categories, all sponsored by lovely local businesses. With winners' trophies and a runner-up gift pack, and nearly 200 bikes to choose from, this was a something of a challenge for the judges. People leaving on bikes that were in line for prizes just before they were announced required some frantic scribbling. In the end, the Best Japanese were both Hondas, an F2 CBX1000 and the orange

An interesting trio

A Triton rider makes his getaway

Two best Brits

Nut-and-bolt perfect – Best Japanese

Best Vintage – a BSA J series 350

An awesome Norcati

Is that a Brough? No, it's the lovely Harley-based Roughly Similar

Jon and the ridiculous Yamaha pit bike hybrid

A fine Darmah, one of the furthest travelled visitors

An Ariel among the plums

Daryl prepares to depart on the incredible Zen

The Super Alce – Best Continental

Relaxing by the wall

CB550. The Super Alce was Best European, with the Laverda SF runner-up. Best British was a T150 Trident you could eat your dinner off, with a Veeline Velocette retaining all its enclosed bodywork in second. A 1930s BSA 350 J-Series won Best Vintage. Trickiest category was Best Custom, as there were so many candidates. As well as choppers, there were some astonishing specials. At least six Tritons, a Norcati, a built from the ground up VW-powered special called Zen, that brutal R1 streetfighter, a splendid GT550, and a Harley Lowrider brilliantly dressed up as a Brough Superior. In the end, this trophy went to a spectacularly clean Suzuki Katana of incredible quality. Best In Show was a lovely 1935 Harley-Davidson 45, used daily.

And with howls, roars and rattles, the car park emptied. Total take was more than £1000, satisfying for an afternoon's (and several months') work. Interesting was the number of open conversations about prostate cancer among attendees, which shouldn't have been too much of a surprise given that blokes aged 50-plus are those most at risk.

Nelson and the organisers thanked trophy sponsors Jon Burt, of New Road Motorcycles, Helmet City Cheddar, Stan Smith, of CDS Motorcycles, Bunny Rabbetts, of A303 Motorcycles, and Harley Masters, of Harley Transport Services, and the lovely people at Bere Cider Company for hosting, providing the thirst-slaking runner-up prizes, and everyone who attended and stuffed the buckets with folding and rattling cash.

Why not try doing a show the 'simple' way yourself? CBG

We've been to

British Motorbike Owners 50th anniversary bike show

Bike enthusiasts' clubs were so important. Joining gave you an excuse to get out and ride, to socialize, blather on about old bikes, and we learned by listening. We borrowed tools, worked out who to trust, and how to detect bull. Lifelong friends were made.

And they still are. Don't believe the doom-mongers – clubs are still thriving, if they realise they've just got to move with the times.

BRIMBO is a shining example of once being for British bikes, now catering for bikes – and riders – of all ages. You want a left-foot gearchange, need an electric start, or ride a modern bike? Great, and welcome!

It's this adaptability that has given BRIMBO its 50th anniversary this year. Its annual show at Lopham Village Hall was a great success. Based around the Norfolk/Suffolk border near Diss, there's a huge catchment, some great roads that really suit ride-outs, and the countryside has always been a place you can find

interesting examples of bikes you may not have seen on InstabookX. And it has nothing to do with age, as both Best In Show and the David Molkenthin trophy for Best Prewar were won by Lewis Cocksedge and his immaculate 1928 Ariel Model B, with his dad, Neil Cocksedge winning Best Single with his '57 BSA B31! Other prizes included Best Twin for Adrian Studd's 1955 BSA A10 and Best Café Racer to the '60 Gold Star of Martin Wadlow. And special mention must go to the rather gorgeous cakes available…

Fifty years is a long time. Thank you to all those involved and their hard work for giving us all somewhere to natter and see other bikes. Long may the likes of BRIMBO continue, and happy birthday! **Brimbo.co.uk** CBG

Fancy a day out?

Good grief. There is so much going on this August, it is hard to know where to start. Well, obviously, August 1 is a good idea. The calendar is rammed with events, shows, rallies, races, sprints, autojumbles and gatherings, and this is just a fraction – we haven't the space to fit all the weekend ride-outs and midweek bike nights that are such familiar parts of the motorcycling world, or steam fairs, or Second World War re-enactments and the multitude of community events that will host classic motorcycle displays... Don't forget to let us know about yours.

- **1** SEPTEMBER ISSUE OF THE CLASSIC MOTORCYCLE IS OUT NOW
- **1-3 Gloucestershire Vintage & Country Extravaganza:** Spectacular 50th anniversary celebration, South Cerney Airfield, near Cirencester. Visit www.glosvintageextravaganza.co.uk
- **2** YOUR *OLD BIKE MART* WITH YOU TODAY
- **2 Huggys Auto Shindig:** Motorcycle/car gathering and swapmeet at Mallory Park Race Circuit, LE9 7QE. Tel 01827 712906, 07968 948886 or 07984 318952. Email huggysspeedshop@yahoo.com
- **2/3 CRMC Classic Motorcycle Festival:** Donington Park.
- **3 Suzuki Sunday:** Ace Café, Ace Corner, North Circular Road, Stonebridge Park, London NW10 7UD. london.acecafe.com
- **3 Llanfair Waterdine Classic Motorcycle Show:** Llanfair Waterdine Village Halls, LD7 1TU. Tel Dave 07773 773072.
- **3 Laverda Jota 50th anniversary gathering:** 10.30am-4.30pm at The New Inn Public House, Main Street, Willersey, Broadway WR12 7PJ. Laverdas only admitted to the venue.
- **4** AUGUST ISSUE OF *REAL CLASSIC* OUT NOW
- **7 Worcester Auto Club Steel Horse Ride-In:** Tower Buildings, Perdiswell Park, Worcester WR3 7SN. Find WAC Motorcycle Club on Facebook or tel 07864 567705.
- **7 Yorkshire Rock and Bike Show:** South Milford, Leeds LS25 5LX. Tickets available at www.yorkshirerocknbikeshow.co.uk
- **9/10 Heritage Sprint:** Betteshanger Park, near Deal, Kent. Email info@heritagesprint.co.uk
- **10 'Normous Newark Autojumble:** Newark Showground, Notts NG24 2NY. www.autojumble.info
- **10 Vintage & Classic Bike Day + VMCC:** Ace Café, Ace Corner, North Circular Road, Stonebridge Park, London NW10 7UD. london.acecafe.com
- **10 Summer Auto Jumble:** Sammy Miller Museum, New Milton, Hants BH25 5SZ. Gates open to sellers at 7am and buyers at 8.30am. Admission £5 for adults and free for under-16s. Cash only please.
- **12 Worcester Auto Club Ride-In:** Tower Buildings, Perdiswell Park, Worcester WR3 7SN. Find WAC Motorcycle Club on Facebook or tel 07864 567705.
- **15-17 GuzziFest:** Bridgnorth, Shropshire. This is a pre-book-only event; visit www.motoguzziclub.co.uk/events/guzzi-fest
- **16 Capel Classic Car & Bike Show:** Capel, Surrey RH5 5HP.
- **16 Scorton Auto and Bike Jumble:** North Yorkshire Events Centre, Scorton, near Richmond, DL10 6EJ. Tel Bert 07909 904705.
- **16/17 Festival of Motorcycling Weekend:** Mallory Park. Visit www.classicbiketrackdays.com/festival-of-motorcycling
- **16/17 Women In Moto:** Uttoxeter Racecourse. Visit womenmoto.co.uk
- **17 Sidecar Sunday & Trike Day:** Ace Café, London NW10 7UD. london.acecafe.com
- **17 All Things Italian:** Sammy Miller Museum. Visit www.sammymiller.co.uk
- **17 Norwood Park Classic Car & Motorcycle Show:** Norwood Park, Halam Park, Southwell, Notts. Visit www.classicshows.org
- **20** SEPTEMBER ISSUE OF *CLASSIC MOTORCYCLE MECHANICS* OUT NOW
- **21** YOUR SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER ISSUE OF *CLASSIC RACER* IS OUT TODAY
- **24 Watton Bike Weekend:** Watton Sports Association and Social Club, 69 Dereham Road, Watton, Thetford IP25 6EZ. Visit www.wattonbikeweekend.online
- **24 Bike Day:** Ace Café, London NW10 7UD. london.acecafe.com
- **24/25 Roughleys Bike Show:** Thousands of visitors expected. Admission £3 from noon-10.30pm at St Petersgate, Stockport, Greater Manchester SK1 1HE. Visit roughleysbikeshow.com
- **27** SEPTEMBER ISSUE OF *CLASSIC BIKE GUIDE* ON SALE
- **31 VMCC (West Wilts section) 'West Wilts Scamper' One Day Run:** Routes from Castle Combe around Wiltshire and South Cotswold lanes. Tel 07771 820175 or email jonhall850@gmail.com.
- **31 Sussex British Motorcycle Owners' Club Bulldog Run:** West Sussex. See www.sbmoc.co.uk for details.
- **31 Harley Day:** Ace Café, London NW10 7UD. london.acecafe.com
- **31 British Bike Bash:** From 10am at Sammy Miller Museum; www.sammymiller.co.uk

Would you like your event, bike night, or gathering to appear in these listings? Let us know at least six weeks in advance by emailing **editor@classicbikeguide.com**

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WHAT'S COMING UP IN THE AUTOJUMBLE CALENDAR?

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• EARLY BIRD ADVANCE (FROM 8:00AM) - £9
• UNDER 16S FREE
newarkautojumble.co.uk

EUROJUMBLE
NETLEY MARSH, HAMPSHIRE SO40 7GY
SEPT 5-6, 2025
• ADULT ADVANCE FRIDAY £9
• ADULT ADVANCE SATURDAY £7
• UNDER 16s FREE
netleymarsheurojumble.com

STRATFORD AUTOJUMBLE
STRATFORD-UPON-AVON RACECOURSE, WARWICKSHIRE, CV37 9SE
SEPT 7, 2025
• ADVANCE TICKETS ON SALE NOW
• ADULT ADVANCE - £5
• UNDER 16S FREE
stratfordautojumble.co.uk

Kempton AUTOJUMBLE
KEMPTON PARK, MIDDLESEX, TW16 5AQ
SEPT 20, 2025
• ADVANCE TICKETS ON SALE NOW
• STANDARD ADVANCE (FROM 9:30AM) - £6
• EARLY BIRD ADVANCE (FROM 8:00AM) - £9
• UNDER 16S FREE
kemptonautojumble.co.uk

AUTOJUMBLE.INFO

Old bike mechanics Directory

Your guide to those who are willing to help us!

THIS IS A UK DIRECTORY OF mechanics and engineers happy to work on our older bikes. Bikes with points and carburettors, as an example. Let us know who is out there, who you trust, because no mechanics means no assistance, which means we'll be stuck looking at our stationary bikes in the shed thinking of the good ol' days... Let us know at editor@classicbikeguide.com

- **Renaissance Motor Cycle Workshops, Addingham, West Yorkshire. 07759 724123** Motorcycle learn about and work on your own bike with Roger – and you don't even need a bike!
- **Engineering Services, near Norwich, Norfolk. 01603 759508 / jdebohun@gmail.com** Jon excels in BMWs, electrics, thread cutting, CAD design and projects.
- **RiE-Store, near Brighton, West Sussex. 07741 261851 / rie-store.com** Ash and the guys know their early American bikes, as well as their British machines.
- **Robin James Engineering Services, Leominster, Herefordshire. 01568 612800** The team here offer all the services needed on classic cars and bikes.
- **AJ's Motorcycles, Hull, East Yorkshire. 07786 165335** Tony can do it all, from two-stroke to four, superbike to tiddlers, restoration and fabrication.
- **Mike Lingard, Knott End, Lancashire. 07526 922771** Brake drum skimming, disc grinding, helicoiling, turning, milling and even casting.
- **Ian Perry, near Hinckley, Leicestershire. 07954 601481** Ian is a very skilled welder specialising in aluminium, and also offers vapor blasting
- **KRF Motorcycles, near Norwich, Norfolk. 07501 275345** Kev has spent his life working on BMWs, has all the tools, and gives BMW Club members a discount.
- **Ray Petty Mechannica, Greenwich, London. 0208 8538002 / ray@raypettymechannica.com** Lots of recommendations for Ray; early Ducati and Italian makes mostly, and great atmosphere.
- **Mike Taylor, Ellesmere Port, Cheshire. 07922 838228 / picknmixtaylor@hotmail.com** Mike specialises in Triumph/BSA triples, and is happy to work on much else, full rebuilds included.
- **Northants Classic Bikes, Rushden, Northamptonshire. 01933 355525** Steve and Julie offer classic sales, parts, and workshop expertise for all classics.
- **Mick Surmann Motorcycles Ltd, Bierton, Aylesbury. 01296 486137** Proper old-fashioned bike shop, from flat tankers to modern bikes, with MoT station.
- **Brooks Engineering, Northwich, Cheshire. 01606 47008 / brookesengineering.co.uk** It has all the equipment necessary for turning, machining, welding and so on, removing broken studs etc.
- **Oak Lea Performance, Pilling, Lancashire. 07930 306009** Geoff does repairs, servicing and restorations, and custom-made exhaust systems are a speciality.
- **Kustom Choppers Ltd, Hingham, Norfolk. 01953 529150 / info@kustomchoppers.co.uk** Daniel works on all older bikes, from servicing and restoration to custom work.
- **Howard Evans, Barton-upon-Humber, North Lincolnshire. 07788 501168** Repair, restoration of classic Japanese bikes, also vapour blasting and carburettor restoration.
- **Max Smeed Restorations, South Manchester. 07307 877781 / max@max-restorations.co.uk** Max is a mechanical engineer and MoT tester, covering all types of jobs on all bikes.
- **Matt's Machine Shop, Abercynon, South Wales. 01443 742791** Works on all kinds of bikes, specialises in imperial British and American, and has a dyno.
- **Wilsons Motorcycles, Kirton, Lincolnshire. 01205 724314 / sales@wilsonsmotorcycles.co.uk** Just outside Boston, Wilsons can work on any motorcycle and has run highly successful race teams.
- **Motorcycle Service Centre, 541 Harrow Road, London, W10 4RH. 0208 9606434** Robbie looks after a huge array of classics in the West London area.
- **HTE motorcycles, near Swaffham, Norfolk. 01328 700711** Hutch specialises in classics and British bikes repairs, projects, wheel-building and engines.
- **RJ Motorcycles, Coalville, North Leicestershire. 01530 833297 / info@rjmotorcycles.co.uk** Always ready to help and will sell one O ring if that's all you need.
- **SRS Engineering, Sutton. 0208 6425685 / srsengineeringsutton.com** Mike can do rebores, machining, head skimming, anything old-school motor engineering.
- **Specialist Welding Service, Banstead. 07957 557935 / specialistweldingservices.co.uk** Andy is a time-served welder capable of the most intricate work on fins, heads and cases.
- **Red Dragon Refinishing, Rhostyllen, Cheshire, near Wrexham. 01978 448983 / wayne@rdwales.com** Blasting, plating, powder-coating and painting are just part of what Red Dragon can do.
- **Wells Forest Classics, near Peterhead, Aberdeenshire. 07766 727924 / scottymcb3@gmail.com** Scotty McBride specialises with Royal Enfield and Moto Guzzi but is happy to look at all makes.
- **Angus Classic Bikes, Forfar, Angus, Scotland. 01307 463838 / www.angusclassicbikes.co.uk** Happy to work on any type of bike, fit tyres, MoT, clean carbs and vapour blast.
- **Bob Grant Motorcycles, Pitscottie, Fife. 01334 829415** Service and repairs, parts, suspension, dyno tuning, vapour blasting, and restoration.
- **Barrie Brown Wheel Building, Windygates, Fife. 01333 352102 / 07711 916722** Complete wheel-building, blasting and restoration service available for any make.
- **Engine Resource Dundee, Dundee. 01382 223686 / engineresource.co.uk** Nearly 50 years of engine remanufacturing and auto engineering.
- **Sandy Bloy's classic repair garage, Perth. 07772 249309** Sandy specialises in classic sales, repairs, parts, and total classic restoration services.
- **Dynotech Ecosse, Hillington, Glasgow. 07779 159065 / dynotechecosse.com** Modern bikes and classics are welcome for routine to total restoration and dyno tuning.
- **Steelworx Motorcycles, Wishaw, Lanarkshire. 07710 753912** Steelworx is known for custom builds, but just as happy doing general repairs and servicing.
- **The VOC Vincent Spares Company Ltd, near Kettering. 01536 312220 / vincentspares.co.uk** Vincent spares in stock, repairs, rebuilds, and a selection of bikes for sale. CBG

Derek Harris 1958-2025

We take a look at the man that took Lewis Leathers and made it cool every decade, through the eyes of his wife Saaya

THE DRIVING FORCE BEHIND LEWIS Leathers, Derek Harris, has sadly died. His wife, Saaya, and Derek came to use the Mortons archive several times with our archivist, Jane, for their book about the history of Lewis Leathers, and all who encountered them found them to be such lovely company. The following is a post from Saaya on the Lewis Leathers website and sums it all up – no one could say it better. All here at CBG send their best wishes at this sad time.

A life well lived

Lewis Leathers' President Derek Harris passed away on Sunday, June 22. He was a very kind, much loved, cool, and very charming man who was always on the go, talking about Lewis Leathers, art, music, and so much more, and it was not unusual for him to wake up and immediately start talking about work. Everything he told us was detailed, vivid, and extremely sensitive, and it is the basis for preserving Lewis' history.

Whenever I complimented him on any one of his many triumphs, he would say: "It's not about me, it's Lewis Leathers," and this humble attitude characterised his approach to everything.

Derek was born in 1958 in Eastbourne, on the south coast of England, but had been travelling to London every weekend since he was a teenager, eventually moving there in 1981, where he lived ever since. The people who gathered at his local pubs, where he would talk and share jokes without any distinction of profession or background, were his most favourite places to relax and have fun. He also met many wonderful people in Japan, a place he adopted as a spiritual home in the 1980s and still has many friends there.

He became president of Lewis Leathers in 2003, 23 years ago, but he first encountered Lewis Leathers in the mid-1960s as a child through newspaper and magazine advertisements. He also saw rockers racing motorcycles in the neighbourhood and realised that they must be wearing Lewis Leathers.

Ten years later, when the punk era arrived, he saw The Clash wearing Lewis Leathers and immediately understood that this was a brand not only with a historical past, but one that was still 'making history.' I think it was fate that led him to the company at an early age.

I will do my best to carry on the gift of his accomplishments and continue the passion he has left us. Derek trusted and loved me with all his heart. It has given me an irreplaceable miracle of life. Speaking here to Derek from my heart, I tell him that everything in my life has changed 180 degrees since I met you. Thank you, and I will remember you forever. I will do my best to protect and carry on the great brand you left us, Lewis Leathers, with all the best staff. I would like to thank the many fans of the Lewis Leathers brand and everyone involved, and I will continue to protect the brand in the spirit of Derek Harris.

Thank you for your continued support,
Mrs Saaya Harris Nohara

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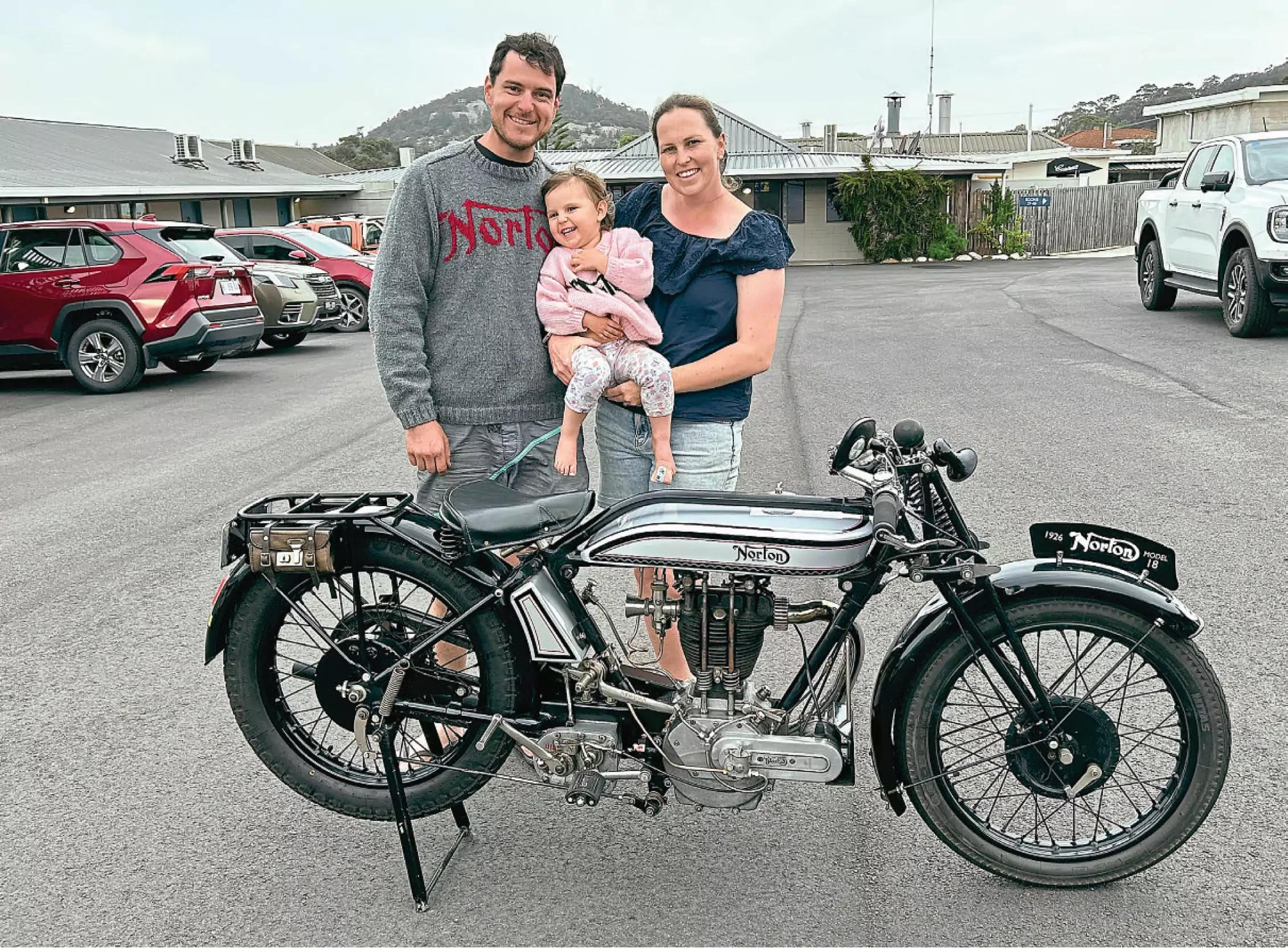


Touring bikes of Tassie

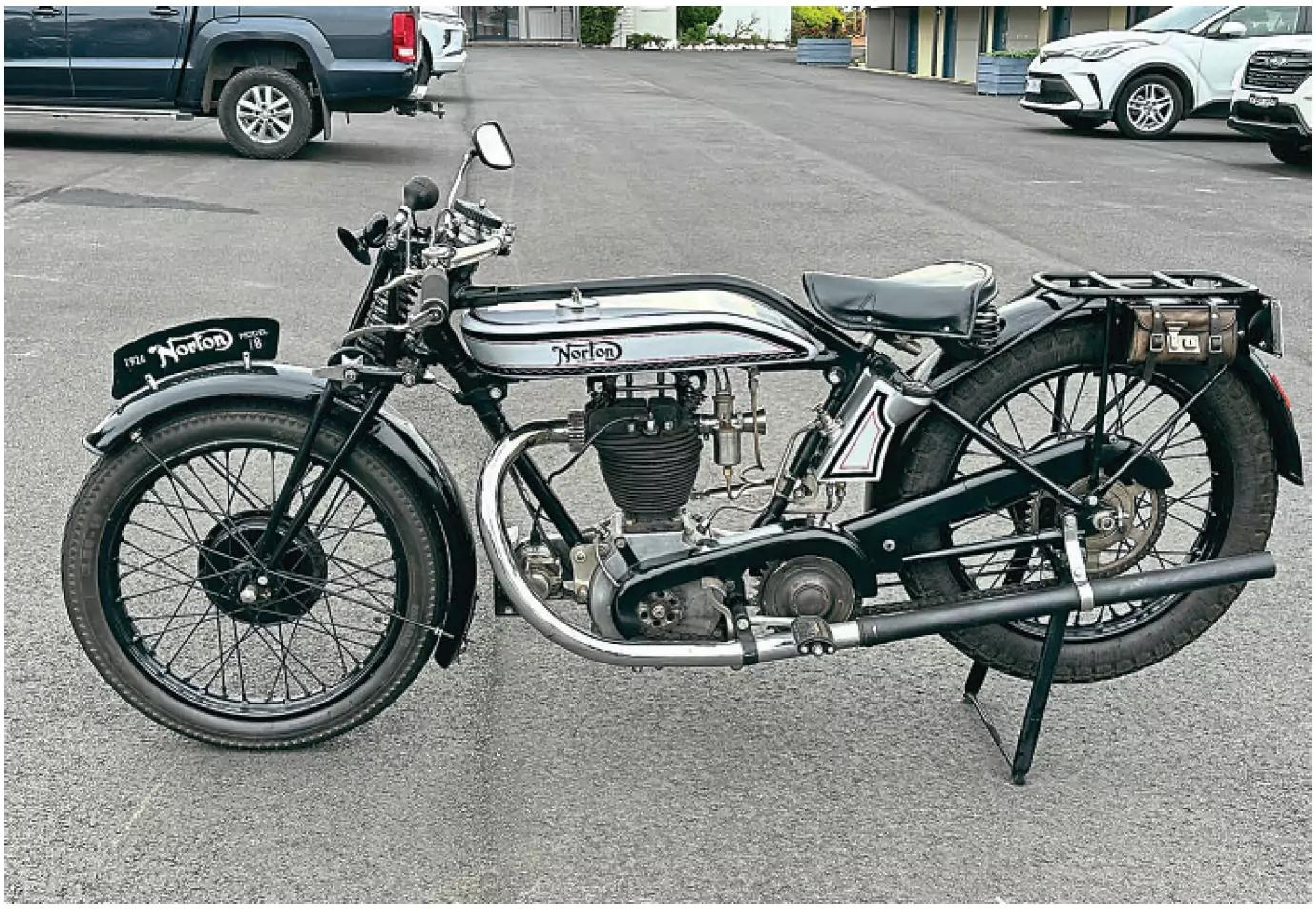
Last month, Alan Cathcart told us of the Tassie rally, a classic bike tour of Tasmania. This issue, we present a few of the wonderful machines he was with…

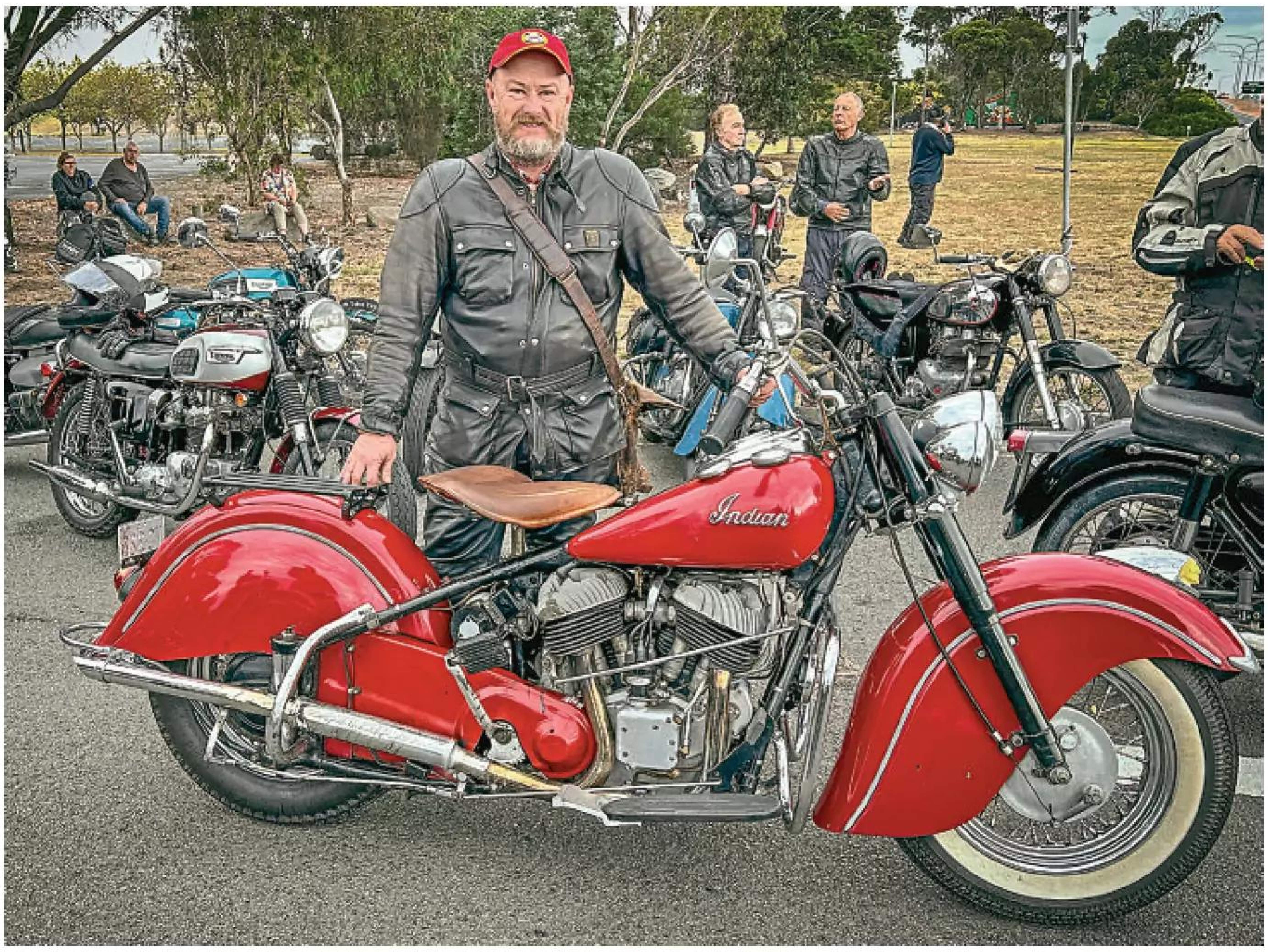
Words and photography by Alan Cathcart

Brendon McKay: 1926 Norton Model 18

Brendon McKay, 34, is a flat tank Norton owner from Albany, Western Australia, and a heavy diesel mechanic by trade. He brought wife Nicola and three-year-old daughter Lexie with him for a good part of the way, Lexie's winning smile making her a hit with all and sundry. "In 2017 I bought a very rusty 1913 Triumph project I spent 18 months recommissioning," said Brendon. "I didn't restore it cosmetically, because you could still see the original Triumph markings on the fuel tank, things like that. Since then, the bike would have done 1550 miles competing in veteran rallies and the Roaring Twenties events. Then I met Peter Lawson, from near Perth, and told him I wouldn't mind a ride on a Norton like his restored 1925 flat tanker, so he loaned it to me for a two-day ride at the Donnybrook Vintage Muster, after which I told him, 'If there's another one of these around, you'd better find me one!' It's a grand bike to ride, with a real sporting flair. My mate Greg Boothy sold me his disassembled 1926 OHV Model 18 project, which had a lot of good parts, including a brand-new old stock frame he'd sourced in Canada, complete with the forks – but it all needed a total rebuild. Peter did the engine, and I built

> **"It was our first time ever in Tasmania, let alone riding a motorcycle around it, and the countryside is unreal, and so varied."**





the rolling chassis. I had it running by last Christmas, in time to put 250 miles on it in preparation for the Tassie Rally.

"It was our first time ever in Tasmania, let alone riding a motorcycle around it, and the countryside is unreal, and so varied. It's surely the best state in Australia for riding a motorcycle, and all the event organisers are generous, lovely people. It's truly an experience, absolutely the best organised event imaginable, and we've all three thoroughly enjoyed ourselves."

Despite what happened mechanically? "Yes. We had a footpeg break at Ulverstone on the first day, but one of the event organisers had a friend with a welder who welded it back on. And then leaving Hobart halfway through, the second gear sleeve gear broke a tooth, so we went on the trailer to Port Arthur, and then got a lift back to Hobart to borrow a 1926 Norton gearset from Howard Burrows, who had one on the shelf!" As you do, in Australia's remotest state... "We got back to Port Arthur, and then together with a pair of friends and a couple of beers, we pulled the gearbox apart and put the borrowed gearset in, and that's how we finished the rally. Huge thanks to Howard for loaning me the parts."

Alex Jackson: 1951 Indian Black Hawk Roadmaster

Kiwi Alex Jackson, 52, from the motorcycle haven of Nelson in the South Island, has lived in Australia for the past 20 years, the last seven in Tasmania. "I never really gelled with mainland Australia. The heat got to me a lot, being from an Alpine region, and coming to Tassie for the first time on a bike rally, within five miles I knew this where I needed to live." A self-employed motorcycle mechanic, good-natured AJ was everyone's first call on the rally for a spot of technical assistance. "I generally work on English motorcycles, mainly high-end stuff, but the bike I'm riding is a diversion, because I like to keep things fresh. It's a 1951 1340cc Indian Roadmaster, the last of the Black Hawk line with telescopic forks and a plunger rear end. It was imported from Florida by a friend, and it's an excellent bike for the rally – it can pass everything but a gas station. I've had it since November, and I still feel like a newborn giraffe, but I'm getting there with it! Twisties I'm not so sure on, but I'm sure we'll be at one. Brakes are at least adequate, which is what really matters on these Tassie roads!" ➡

> ***"It's an excellent bike for the rally - it can pass everything but a gas station. I've had it since November, and I still feel like a newborn giraffe..."***

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“We rode up the east coast of Tasmania once, and I attempted to ride around the island on my Bantam but failed miserably, because it started snowing and I gave up...”

Andrew Sutherland: 1937 BMW R5

Hobart engineer Andrew Sutherland, 68, was born in Yorkshire of Scottish parents who emigrated to Australia as Ten Pound Poms in 1966. “We came to Tasmania as a family, and I grew up knowing people like Robert Walch, who’s riding his Velocette on the rally. When we were young, we were all riding horses, but by the time we got to the age of 16 or 17 we’d lost interest and bikes took over. Robert had a little Royal Enfield Ensign, I had a BSA Bantam, and we went everywhere on them. We rode up the east coast of Tasmania once, and I attempted to ride around the island on my Bantam but failed miserably, because it started snowing and I gave up.”

The immaculate 1937 BMW R5 Andrew was riding on the rally was a far cry from that Bantam, though. “I’ve had it for two years, and when I got it the cosmetics had been done, but it needed a mechanical makeover – I’ve done 4000 miles on it since I rebuilt it, so it’s going alright. It was originally exported from Germany to the UK importer Frazer-Nash towards the end of December 1937, so it was the last of the production R5s. Frazer-Nash then sold it new to a brokerage company called Goodman Fielding, which, according to its records, then exported it to Australia. It’s a lovely machine that’s ideal for the rally

“Fantastic! When I’m pulling up the hills I can out-corner those Rapides and Shadows without a problem. And also, it’s got so much torque – I just tuck down behind it the clock and let it rip. Heaven!”

– it’s very nice to ride, it’s very agile and beautifully built, and everything fits together nicely. It has a comfortable rubber saddle, a bit like a tractor seat, but with a large spring that works well in substituting for having no rear suspension – the next year, they put a plunger rear end on it. But it’s a lovely machine and really quite enjoyable to ride. And for its age, it’s very usable.”

Gary Nemecek: 1960s Norvin

Victoria-based Gary Nemecek, 58, is a fan of Vincent specials, like the Norvin he rode on the Tour of Tassie. “True, I’m a Vincent tragic,” he admitted, with a laugh. “I have three Shadows, four Rapides, six or seven Comets, and then I also have a Slater Egli, a Patrick Godet Egli, and three Norvins – a single and two twins, but I concentrate on riding this one.”

And that’s a rare beast, because squeezing a 50° V-twin Vincent motor into the space left vacant by removing a parallel-twin Norton engine usually requires the chassis to be an earlier wideline Featherbed frame, not a later-model slimline version like the one on Gary’s bike. “I met the guy who built it after I bought it at the Mecum Auction in Las Vegas in 2010, was fortunate enough to speak to him about how it came about and got a lot of photos showing how he built it back in the mid-1960s. The engine is out of a red Rapide he owned back then, which he crashed,

➡

Coventry Eagle
FLYING 8

Excelsior
316

“The bikes always should be used, and I actually enjoy having people do that. I can’t ride all of them myself, so I’m very happy to loan the bikes out to people who know what they’re doing and are good riders.”

but he had no money at the time to repair it. But he also had an early 1960s Norton Dominator 99, with the slimline Featherbed frame. The reason you won’t see too many of these Norvins with a slimline is because the Vincent motor is very difficult to insert on those – but pretty amazingly, the photos showed how he quickly pulled the engine out of the Rapide, and within two or three days, he had it sitting in the Norvin. So that’s why I’ve kept it exactly the same as what it was back in the old photographs. He did not have to cut the frame, but he instead took the back lug off the engine to install it. I had the engine out about two years ago to do a rebuild on it, and the clearances are within one millimetre to get it in there! At the time I thought why don’t I CNC-cut new engine plates, and then I thought no, keep it original, because he’s hand-cut them, the whole lot. He’d owned the bike until 2010 and just got to a point in his life where he had to sell his whole Vincent collection, so I knew I had to have this Norvin. He was broken-hearted, because he’d had it his entire adult life.” Riding it on the faster stretches of deserted Tasmanian roads must have been a thrill? “Fantastic! When I’m pulling up the hills I can out-corner those Rapides and Shadows without a problem. And also, it’s got so much torque – I just tuck down behind it the clock and let it rip. Heaven!”

John Bennett: 1952 Excelsior Talisman 250 Sidecar and 1925 Coventry Eagle

John Bennett, 70, from Kinglake West, up in the hills north of Melbourne, likes to do the unusual. Even so, it was unexpected to find a man who formerly worked for Honda Australia building the frames for the superbikes raced to countless major titles by Andrew Johnson and Tasmanian Malcolm Campbell back in the 1980s to be riding something as mundane as a 1952 Excelsior Talisman 250cc two-stroke twin, hitched to a lightweight sidecar. Especially when he had an almost equally unlikely second bike in the van as back-up – a 1925 Coventry Eagle Super Eight 1000cc V-twin! John's three-wheeler heritage had seen him racing Sidecar Speedway in the 1970s using his own motors concocted by grafting on a fourth cylinder to a Suzuki TR750 triple two-stroke motor to produce a 1000cc four-cylinder stroker. "That worked very well," he recalled, with a glint in his eye. "It was a horrible thing to ride, and scarily powerful, but good fun in a sidecar on a shale track, where you want to spin the back wheel to help it turn!"

So, how come the Excelsior? "It's the improbability of survival aboard it that's so enticing! I like to give myself a challenge in terms of objectives. Can I get a 1952 outfit powered by Excelsior's own robustly built 250cc parallel-twin two-stroke engine with a five-bearing crankshaft and 180-degree crankshaft, plus a four-speed Albion gearbox bolted directly to the rear of the crankcase assembly that's capable of 50mph on level ground with the sidecar fitted around the Tour of Tassie course? The answer is almost certainly no without lengthy stops for repairs – hence the Coventry Eagle in the van driven by a mate to bring out when needed to keep up with the others in between stops to repair the Excelsior! This is the second Tassie tour I've done, and I will probably do the next one – but for that I'd like to bring something really unusual along." All said with a straight face, as he accepted the Award for the Most Original Postwar Bike at the end-of-rally dinner!

> **"It's the improbability of survival aboard it that's so enticing! I like to give myself a challenge in terms of objectives."**

Peter Bender: Brough Superiors

In late 2021, after 35 years spent developing their company Huon Aquaculture to employ upwards of 1000 people in Tasmania, Peter Bender and his wife Frances sold it. This allowed Peter to spend more time on expanding his globally recognised motorcycle collection located in their magnificent, ultra-modern enclave Tinderbox built in 2021.

"I started riding bikes to get about the farm when I was young, and then I did a bit of trials riding," recalled Peter. "But I've always loved British bikes, and I bought my first one when I was 20, a Matchless 350 which I still have. I bought it in bits and had fun putting it all together. I then went onto a 350 Royal Enfield – all the bikes I bought initially were quite cheap ones, because I couldn't afford anything too costly. I really only got into the expensive bikes about 15 years ago, after our hard work on growing our business began to pay off and I could afford them.

"Vincents and Brough Superiors are really my two favourites, because Broughs were the best in their day in the 1920s and 1930s, and the Vincents were the best in the late 1930s, 1940s and 1950s. But there's just something about Broughs, because every bike is a bit different. The Vincents all tend to look the same; a Rapide looks pretty much the same as a Black Shadow – it's just the cases aren't painted. But the Broughs were more made to order for ➡

the customer, and they had different engine configurations, different frames, rigid frame, plunger frame, and Bentley & Draper sprung rear end, like on the SS100 I'm riding on the rally. You've got so many different combinations, and if you want to collect most of them, you need to buy a lot of bikes!

"If you include the Brough Superior car and the prototype Radial bike, I've got 16 Broughs altogether at the moment, and six of those are being ridden in the rally, plus we have a spare one in the trailer, just in case." No sign of a four-cylinder Brough, though! "No, they're fairly hard to come by, as they only made 10 of the Austin-engined ones. I was actually the losing bidder on the derelict one from Bodmin Moor; had we sold the business by then, I might have tried a bit harder!"

That he loans so many bikes to other people, it's evident that Peter believes that even the most valuable and historic bikes in his collection should be ridden, not just stored in a museum. "Yes, definitely – the bikes always should be used, and I actually enjoy having people do that. I can't ride all of them myself, so I'm very happy to loan the bikes out to people who know what they're doing and are good riders."

Peter also has an appetite for clocking up the miles himself. He took part in every day's ride on the Tour of Tassie, including the optional tours. "Look, I just love riding bikes, so I take every opportunity I can. Before the rally, we had four of the six Broughs to run in that I'd had rebuilt, since we like to get about 2000 miles on each bike before we let anyone else loose on them, so that took a while, but I very much enjoyed doing it. As you now know, we have great roads here in Tasmania, so it was no real hardship!"

The Bender 'shed' in fact has an extremely well-equipped workshop, with its own machine room. "We have a lathe and a milling machine, a press, welding gear, and various grinders and polishers. We can do most tasks in-house." How many bikes are there in the collection? "We have about 60 British motorcycles, and I've also got a few Spanish Trials bikes – they're in a shipping container out the back because I've run out of room, but I do have plans to double the size of the shed to spread them out a bit more."

What does Peter think the secret is of the undoubted success of this event? In 10 days of speaking to dozens of the participants, I didn't hear one single even minor criticism. "I think it's because it's a rider's rally. I've been to many such events overseas, and in Europe because there's so much traffic, it's difficult to organise a rally where everybody is riding through the countryside at the same time to get from one place to another, so you stay in a location for six or seven days, and they just give you maps showing where you can ride to with your mates, meaning the whole group doesn't go off together. They also tend to spend a lot of time with bus tours of the area, because you can't have even 60 bikes, let alone twice that, park up at somewhere like the Leaning Tower of Pisa. You tend to spend as much time doing bus tours as you do riding, and when you are riding, there's so much traffic that it's just not as much fun. There's very little traffic here in Tassie, and we have great roads, which is good for travelling from one place to another. So, yes, that's the key – it's more of a rider's rally than most others." **CBG**

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03/12/23

CBG

Your guide to...

MV125 GTLS

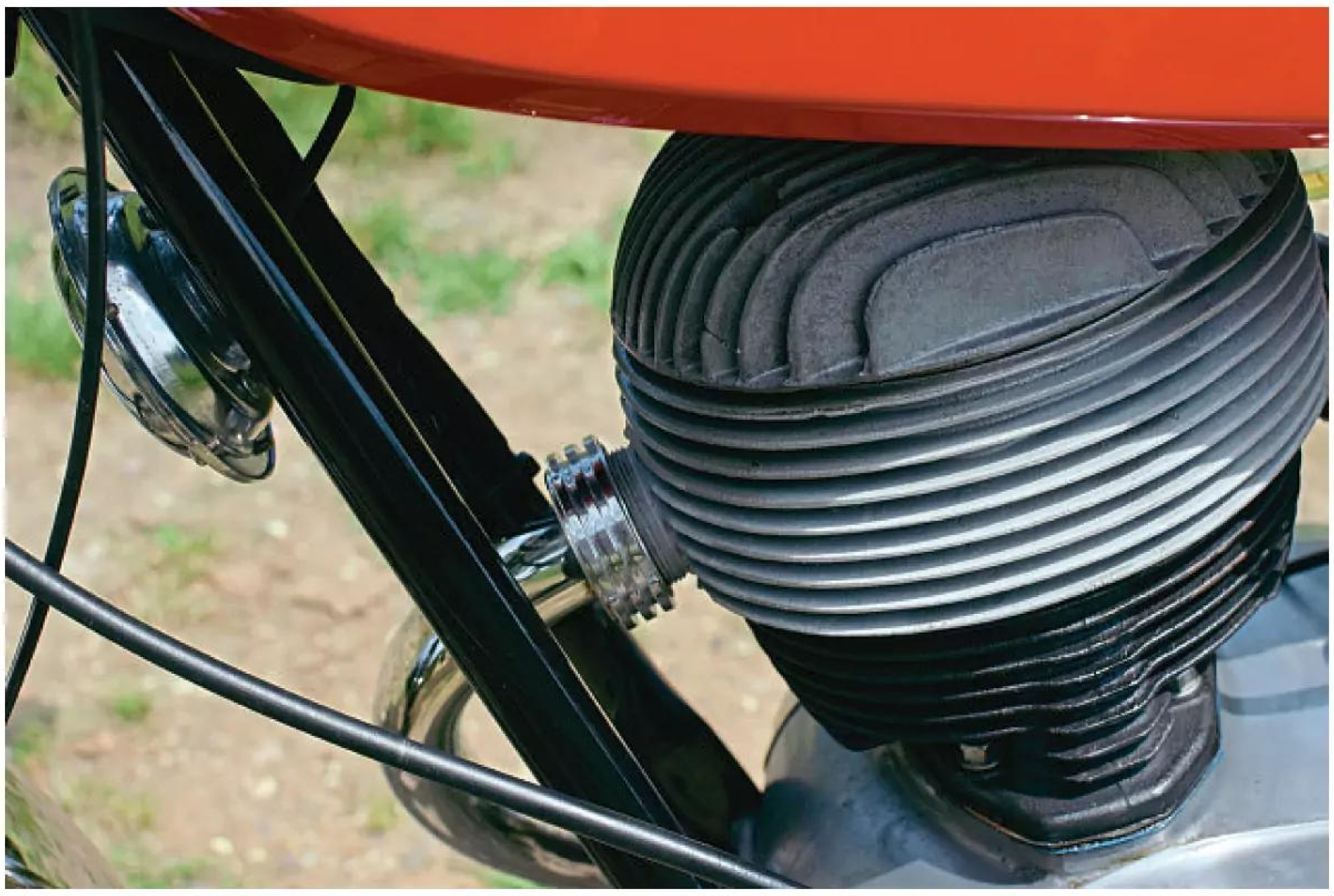
Why did the Italian kids get all the cool 125s? Well, we can now...

Words and photographs by Oli Hulme

When you think MV Agusta, certainly the classic era motorcycles, the bikes that spring to mind are the imposing America 750, the world-beating 500 GP racers or possibly the 1970s fully faired twin 350 models. But MV Agusta made smaller bikes too, turning out sporty 125s for the discerning road rider for many years – and some world-beating 125cc racers, too.

By the late 1960s it was cashing in on the success of Italian legend Giacomo Agostini in Grand Prix by building out-and-out small sportsbikes. In 1969, a new 125cc machine, the 125 GTLS, was launched by MV at the Milan show. This had an OHV, 123cc, air-cooled engine. MV claimed a top speed of 120kph (75mph) from 9bhp for this no-frills lightweight pocket rocket, which was no slouch for a basic OHV single in this capacity. It was assisted by a five-speed gearbox with a one-up-four down racing shift.

The GTLS 125 was designed to attract buyers among the young Italian tearaway market, and they needed to be well-heeled tearaways too, because MV machines of any kind were never cheap. It came with stainless mudguards, Tommaselli Daytona twistgrip, Tommaselli clip-ons and Matador levers, a CEV headlight and switchgear, no indicators, an Emevvi seat, CEV instruments in a cute alloy binnacle, Marzocchi ➡



forks and Grimeca brakes. The rearsets were a factory fitting, with a dogleg left-foot kick-start to clear them. Electrical power was supplied by a flywheel magneto, there was a Silentium silencer, and the frame was a spine arrangement, with twin shocks and the crankcases as a stressed member, while a substantial top tube kept everything stable. It only came in red and black.

The GTLS lasted officially on the books until 1973, when production stopped with just 1023 made as the market for expensive 125s was limited.

A joy forever

Sometimes, it takes a while for a motorcycle to make an impact on the senses. And sometimes, the machine is so drop-dead gorgeous that it stops you in your tracks.

This particular MV Agusta 125 GTLS was spotted at a bike night last year. Surrounded by Japanese hyperbikes, mighty Harley-Davidsons and veritable forest of Triumphs and Nortons, the tiny MV was an instant showstopper, from the curve on the crankcases and the finish on the mudguards to the machined exhaust ring and the perfect rearsets.

Despite staking out the stunning little rocket-ship all evening, I did not track down the owner. Towards the end, I turned my head for 30 seconds, and there it was, gone. It had vanished into the night like a vision of beauty spotted in a mediterranean café, leaving only a memory. The MV reappeared early this spring and disappeared once again like the tiny Will o' the Wisp it is. But it was such a stunning little motorcycle, time was found for a certain amount of detective work to reveal what it was, and who it belonged to, and so it was tracked down.

Ian, the owner, had bought the MV from now sadly closed Italian specialist Made In Italy motorcycles in 2017, a barn find non-runner with no documents.

"The engine did turn over and all five gears on the one-up four-down gearbox selected," said Ian. It was clear the MV was going to need work but, like everyone who has seen it, he was smitten with the little 125.

He discovered that the GTLS had been dispatched to a dealership called Agency Mengarelli in Osimo, Ancona, Italy, on December 20, 1971. It had cost the new owner 330,000 lire – about £220 then and £4000-plus today. At the time, a Suzuki Stinger 125 cost about £170.

Ian said: "The engine did turn over and all the gears selected. The bike was all there, apart from a missing dip/horn switch and rear brake light switch, and the seat was incorrectly covered. The ignition switch was badly damaged because

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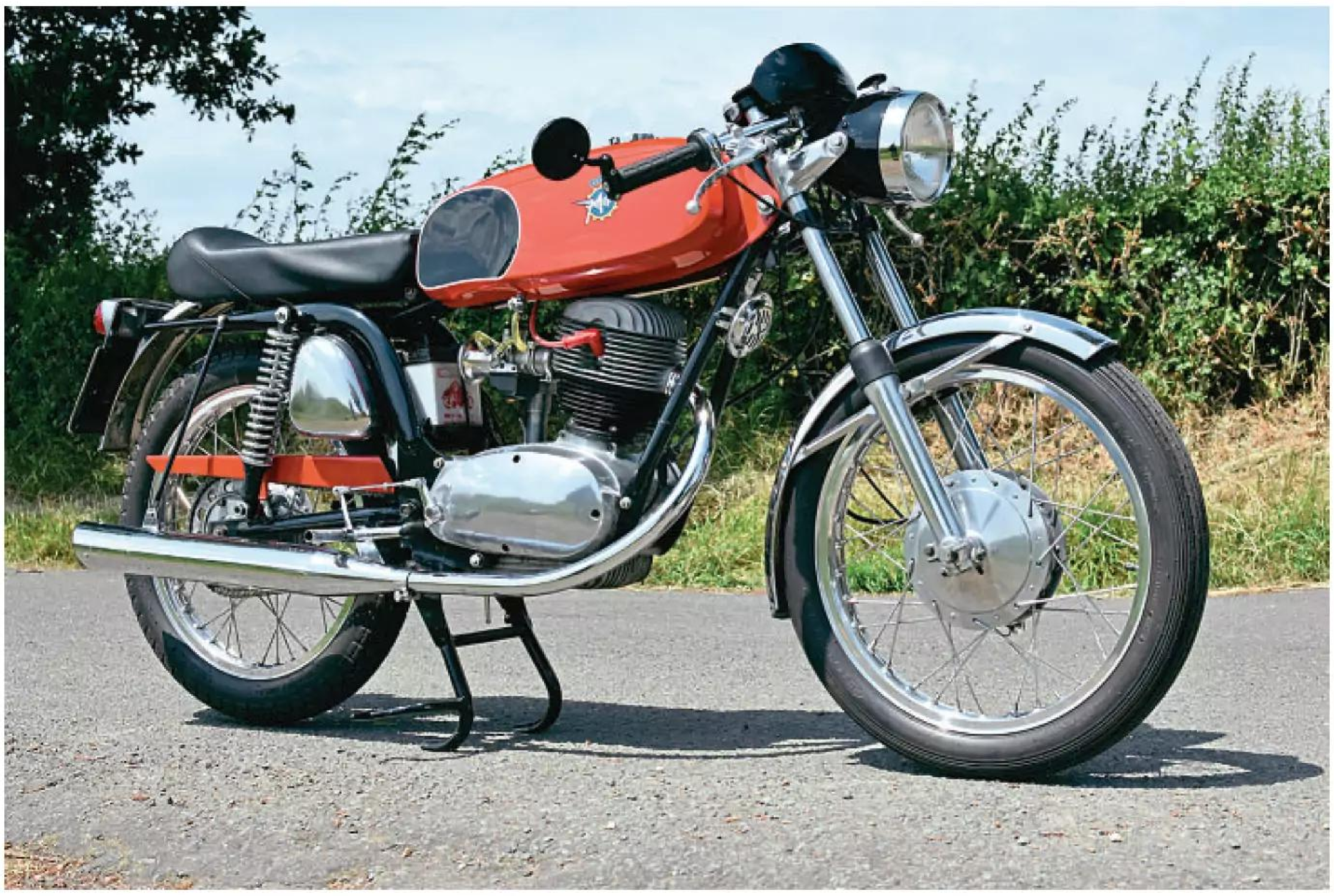
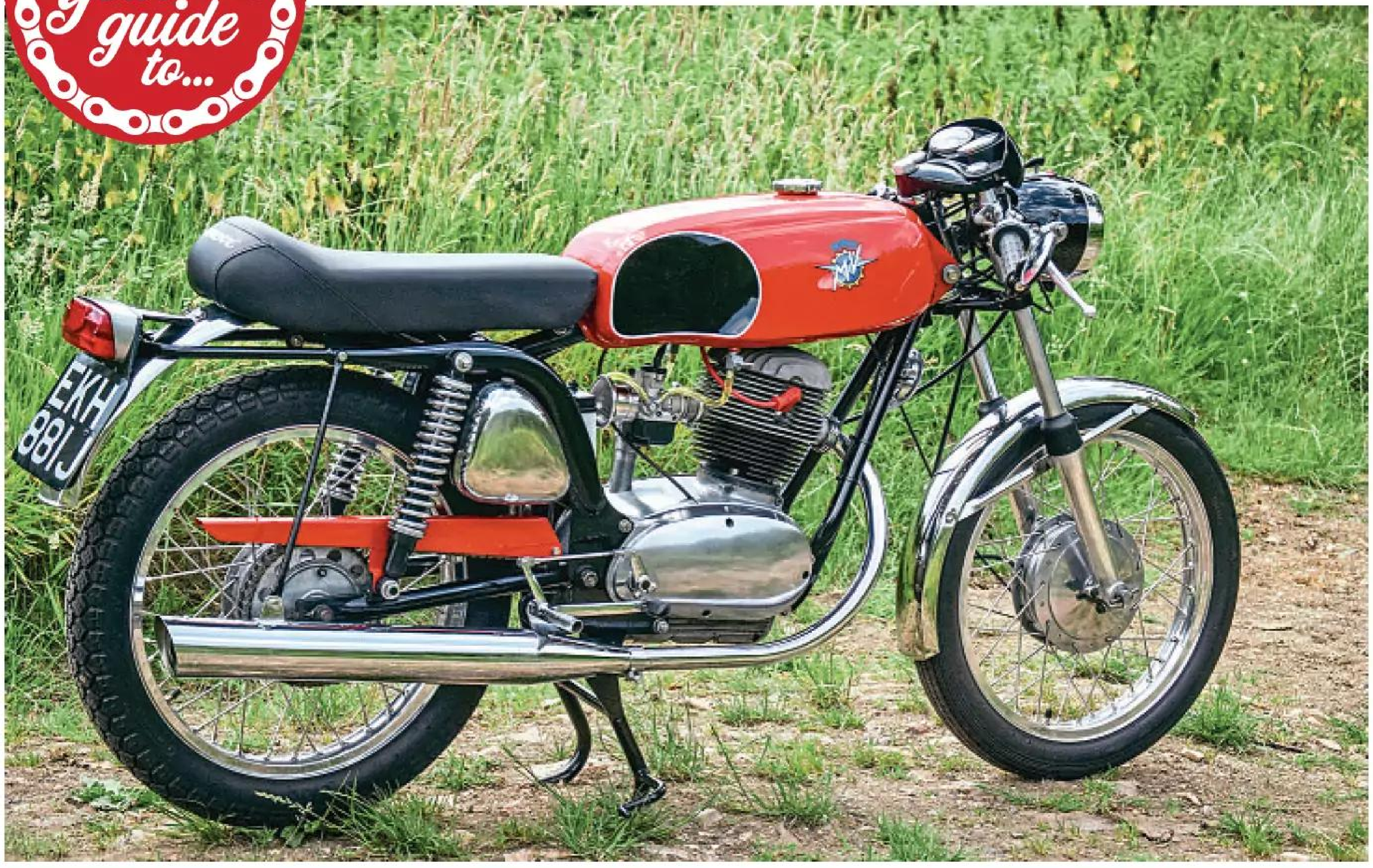


"The bike was all there, apart from a missing dip/horn switch and rear brake light switch, and the seat was incorrectly covered. The ignition switch was badly damaged because at some point someone had butchered it with a screwdriver to get it going..."



at some point someone had butchered it with a screwdriver to get it going, and to replace this one part proved very difficult. Eventually, after many months of searching, a new old stock item was found in America, of all places. It turns out that, fortunately, many of the parts used by MV were common to other manufacturers' machines, which made finding replacement items much easier than you might expect.

"I joined the MV Owners' Club, which was fantastic in providing a dating certificate so I could get a UK registration number from the DVLA, and it also provided a lot of advice and helped source spares."

Electrical issues are usually common with 1960s/70s Italian machines, but things were not too bad on the MV: "The ignition, made in Varese by Dansi, was okay, apart from a loose wire in the mag and needing a new condenser and points."

MV Agusta originally used a 22mm Dell'Orto MB22B carburettor on the GTLS, but on Ian's bike it had been changed to a square slide VHB, common to many Italian machines of the 1970s. It was ultrasonically cleaned but still proved troublesome, an experience anyone who has restored a 1970s Italian motorcycle with an old Dell'Orto will recognise.

In the end, Ian did the sensible thing. "I eventually bit the bullet and purchased a new Dell'Orto PHB round slide carb from Eurocarb. The only thing was Eurocarb had no 22mm carbs in stock and didn't expect one to be in stock anytime soon; a combination of Covid and the Italians liking to shut down for the summer. An in stock 24mm was purchased and fitted with no ill effects."

This may be because Ian had discovered that the MV needed a rebore and the maximum oversize had already been reached, so the barrel was bored out to 60mm and an MVB RS piston fitted,

SPECIFICATION

ENGINE: 123cc OHV air-cooled single **BORE/STROKE:** 53mm/56mm **CARBURATION:** 22mm Dell'Orto **COMPRESSION:** 10:1 **TRANSMISSION:** Five-speed gearbox **IGNITION:** Flywheel magneto **FRONT WHEEL:** 2.75 x 18 **REAR WHEEL:** 2.75 x 18 **FRONT SUSPENSION:** Marzocchi hydraulic forks REAR SUSPENSION**:** Twin oil-damped shocks FRONT BRAKE**:** 158mm drum **REAR BRAKE:** 123mm drum **LENGTH:** 75in **WHEELBASE:** 50in (1425mm) DRY **WEIGHT:** 102kg **FUEL TANK:** 15 litres **POWER:** 9bhp **TOP SPEED:** 70-75mph

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MV Agusta – the dream of a Count

MV Agusta made its first motorcycle in 1943 and its first production machine in 1946.

The original Agusta company was founded, like many major Italian industrial giants, by landowning aristocracy – Count Giovanni Agusta, who had built his first aircraft in 1907 and established the Agusta aviation company in 1923. Agusta made aeroplanes at Malpensa Airport, which was, handily, on land owned by the Agusta family. Four years after he founded the aviation company, Count Giovanni died and left the business to his four sons, Domenico, Vincenzo, Mario and Corrado. Dominico became the new count and with his brother Vincenzo became the driving force behind the company.

At the end of the Second World War, Italian companies were banned from making aircraft. Dominico, a life-long motorcyclist on road and race track, turned the factory over to making motorcycles, buses and boats. Although Count Agusta had been born in Sicily, the factories were all based around Milan, and a rivalry developed between MV and fellow Italian motorcycle legends Gilera and Moto Guzzi, both also based around Milan. It was his rivalry with Gilera that really made headlines.

The motorcycles were named MV from Meccanica Verghera, the latter being the name of the village where motorcycle manufacturing was established. Initially, MV made utility two-stroke singles, but when Italy was allowed to make aircraft again, Dominico cut a deal with US company Bell to make helicopters under licence. Count Agusta had struck gold and made enough money from helicopters for him to pursue his true passion of motorcycle racing. Rarely leaving Italy, he built a villa in the middle of the factory complex, where the autocratic figure could control every aspect of the company, of which he was sole shareholder.

MV continued making small two-strokes, including the striking MV Pullman and other machines like scooters and utility tricycles, but customers in the north of Italy found the little two-strokes a bit gutless and wanted bikes with more torque to climb mountain passes on. MV moved into four-strokes with a bit more oomph. Meanwhile, the racing team was firmly established by the simple expedient of poaching Gilera's engineers and riders, and later, in 1958, Gilera, Moto Guzzi and MV Agusta agreed that owing to the spiralling cost of developing racing motorcycles and growing public concern in Italy about the number of deaths in races, all three factories would withdraw from racing.

Just a few months later, Count Agusta changed his mind and returned to racing, paying substantial sums to successful British riders such John Surtees and Mike Hailwood to move to MV from rival British and Japanese manufacturers. When Hailwood left to rejoin Honda in the mid-1960s, MV promoted the handsome and charming young Italian racer Giacomo Agostini to team leader, and he stunned the world of racing by beating the mighty Honda team to the World 500cc Championship with MV, making him a hero among the Italian youth… which did sales of MV's road bikes no harm at all.

Originally, the plan was that sales of MV Agusta road bikes would pay for the racing effort, but the profits on new bike sales were not even close to paying the racing bills. MV Agusta persisted, making a range of stunning road bikes in all capacities and formats, the massive profits from the helicopter and aircraft business propping it up.

Count Dominico Agusta died in 1971, but bike production continued with MV designs, leading the way in motorcycle development. Suzuki borrowed heavily from MV for the engine on its GS fours, while MV twins and singles ushered in significant styling changes when designer Guigiaro got their hands on the styling after the count died, developing bikes with sharper lines and square barrels and crankcases – design principles subsequently followed by many other manufacturers. Sadly, these efforts came to nothing in the cold, hard realities of the economic crash of the late 1970s and the original company closed in 1980. The name was revived by Cagiva in 1995, but that was a very different MV Agusta.

> ***"When Hailwood left to rejoin Honda in the mid-1960s, MV promoted the handsome and charming young Italian racer Giacomo Agostini to team leader, and he stunned the world of racing by beating the mighty Honda team to the World 500cc Championship with MV."***

bringing it up to 150cc. "It runs very nicely. Instead of the standard 53mm piston, anyone with keen eye might notice that a spacer plate is needed under the barrel due to RS 60mm piston being larger with a domed head, otherwise the piston would have clouted the valves."

The bike runs really quite well; factory records state the 125 could reach a giddy 70mph and the RSS version about 80mph. "I have never tried to reach that but it's a very light bike only being around 100kg," said Ian. "The paint work was done by JBS of Yeovil, which did a superb job as always."

The seat was recovered and Ian persuaded Classic Transfers to reproduce the Emevvi logo, providing him with a stencil to put the badge on the tank and providing the firm with a template for future use. The stainless mudguards stamped Inox (Italian for stainless-steel) were polished to a fine shine by Doug Taylor Metal Finishing of Banwell, which also re-chromed the twistgrip throttle and the rearsets, and polished the wheel rims, which were then laced with stainless spokes. The frame was powder-coated, a decision that Ian regrets as he feels the finish applied was too thick and clogged some of the threads. The

stainless-steel rear mounted toolboxes, which were considered dated in the 1970s and often removed by young owners, had survived and were restored to their former glory.

The sticker on the petrol tank contains 34 stars, one for each Grand Prix title MV Agusta had won up until 1971; MV added a star to a new sticker every time it won a world championship.

As a finishing touch, Ian met Giacomo Agostini in 2019 at Mallory Park when he attended a meeting with the MV club and Ago signed the tank for him. In 2022, as a private entry in the Bristol Classic Bike Show, it was lucky enough to win first in Best Continental.

"It's a lovely bike to ride because it is so light," said Ian. "It's nicer to ride than my Ducati Desmo 250…" CBG

Other MV 125s (pictures courtesy Bonhams)

1953 Monalbero racer

An over-the-counter racer for privateers developed directly from MV works bikes. The Monalbero (single-camshaft) 125 racer was born. It had a train of gears to drive its upstairs cam and produced a maximum of 16bhp at 10,300rpm. The cycle parts were virtually an exact copy of the MV works bikes. The Monalbero 125 racer proved an enormous success, remaining in production until 1956.

1954 MV Pullman

MV's 125cc two-stroke was a world away from the DKW singles every other manufacturer was turning out. With a unit construction, single-cylinder engine featuring detachable transfer ports, the Pullman was part-bike, part-scooter, with an unusual frame featuring a large-diameter curving front downtube, foot boards, single sprung saddle, twist-grip gearchange, and small wheel/wide tyre combination.

1957 Turismo Rapido Lusso

The Turismo Rapido was one of the earliest MV 125 four-stroke roadsters, made in the 1950s. Neat and simple, the engine, which eventually developed into the GTLS, was an OHV unit single with 54x54mmm bore/stroke producing just 6.5bhp at 6000rpm with a wet clutch and four-speed transmission. The carburettor was a Dell'Orto matched with flywheel magneto ignition. The frame was a double cradle tubular and pressed steel structure with a telescopic fork and twin rear shocks. Despite the low power, MV claimed a top speed of 60mph.

125 Sport

In 1975, MV released a new 125, the Sport, with a new frame, an engine with squared off fins and cases (but largely the same internals) and a new look, aping the company's race bikes. Looking like a miniature 350, it came with an optional full race fairing, a suede seat, glass fibre racing tailpiece and a silver frame. Undeniably pretty, the 125 Sport was one of the very last machines made by the original MV company, going out of production in 1980, though many bikes remained in the showrooms unsold for years after that.

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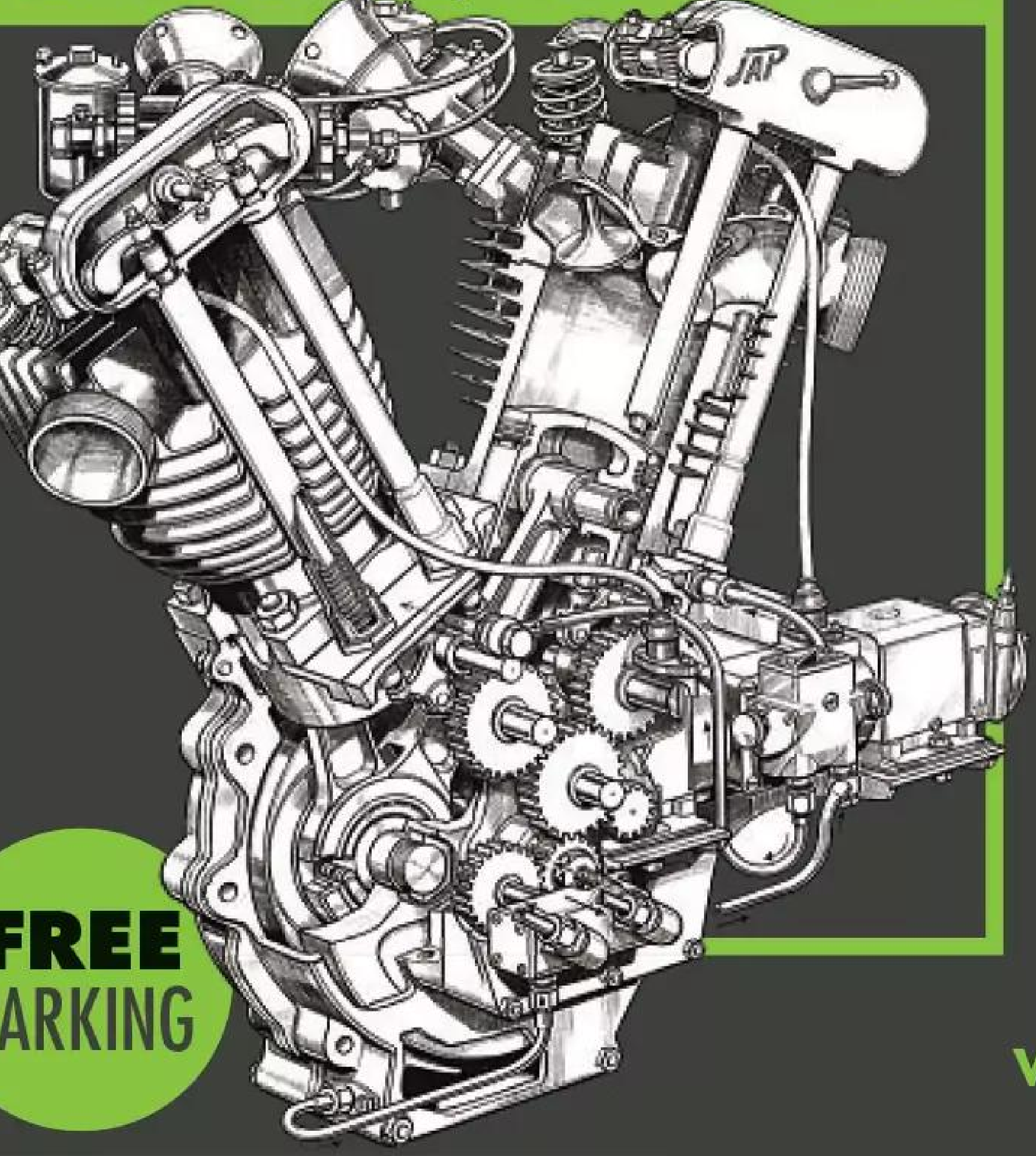

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TRIDENT

Frank Westworth looks back at:

Triumph Trident T150V

Three's No Crowd. Three cylinders in the engine, five gears in the 'box. Frank Westworth hits the high road with an old favourite...

Photos by Chris Spaett, John Young and Frank Westworth

THIS ENTIRE SERIES OF STORIES IS BASED AROUND THE happily large numbers of genuinely fine motorcycles I've been lucky enough to ride over the last quarter-century or so. Almost every time I've been offered a Triumph, my acceptance has been tinged with caution. There's a reason for this. It is rarely a fun thing to call up Proud Owner and ask them to bring a trailer. However, this example was surprisingly good. Really. No, no – it was! Honest…

Oh my, a T150! In my slightly unusual motorcycle world, the sight of a Trident awaiting the placement of my posterior upon its padded perch is almost always a welcome sight. More than that, the sound of a Trident idling on three cylinders is even more welcome, if a little less common. Why the welcome vibes? Because I always enjoy riding Tridents, particularly Tridents belonging to someone else. My experience of actually living with the UK's best attempt at a 1970s superbike has been – shall we say – patchy. But if their idiosyncrasies are someone else's problem, rather than mine, then hooray and off we go.

And, of course, this is an unusual Trident. Not that they aren't all unusual, almost by definition, but this one is a 1972 T150V, with drum brake up front. I simply knew that was all wrong, and when my friend Chris offered the bike, as a borrower I was compelled by smugness to reveal that 'all five-speed Tridents had disc front ends.' The reasoning behind this brash announcement? I'd never seen – or at least never ridden – such an animal.

Although there is a Triumph Hurricane in The Shed which has both five gears and an unusually effective drum front

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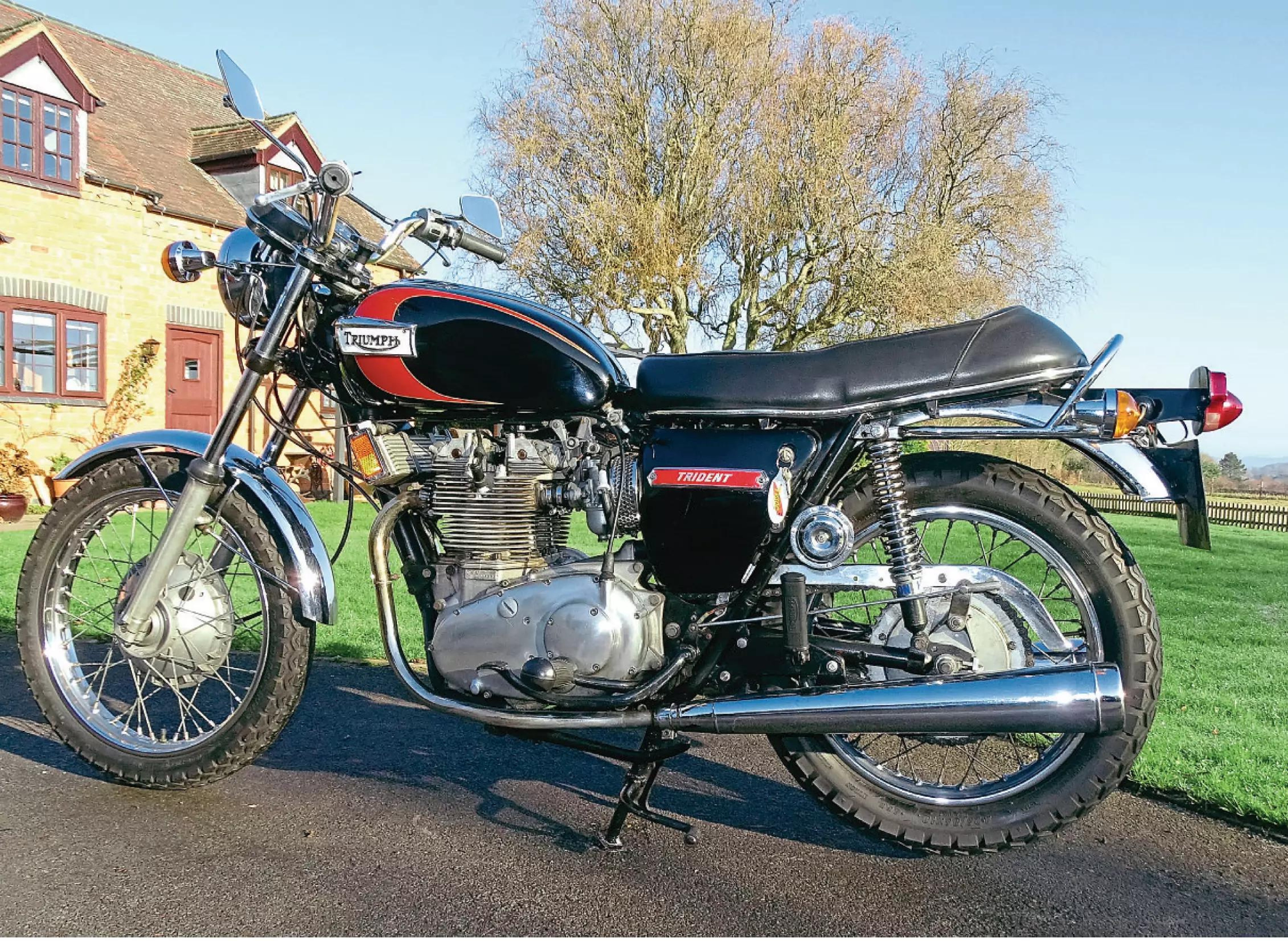
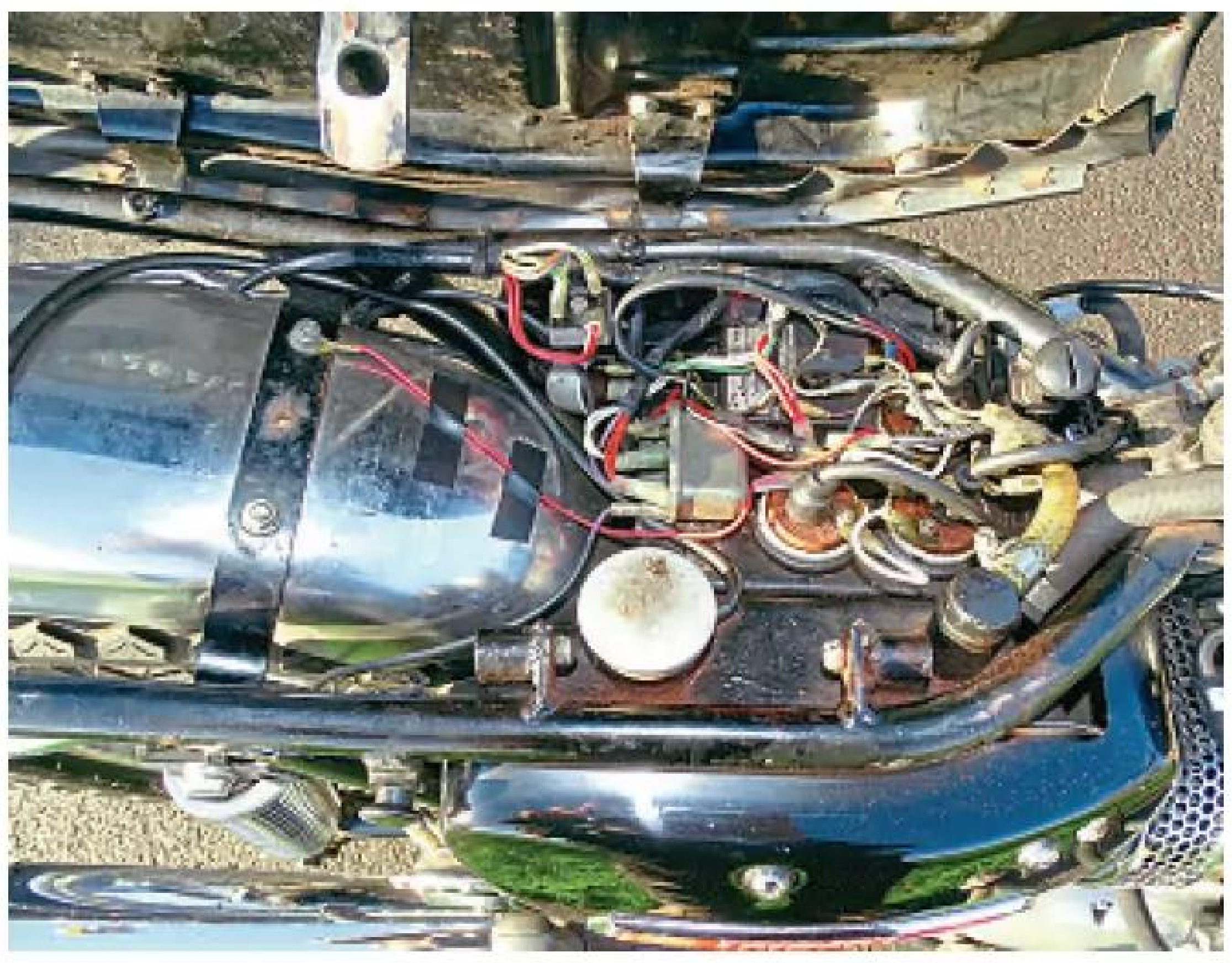
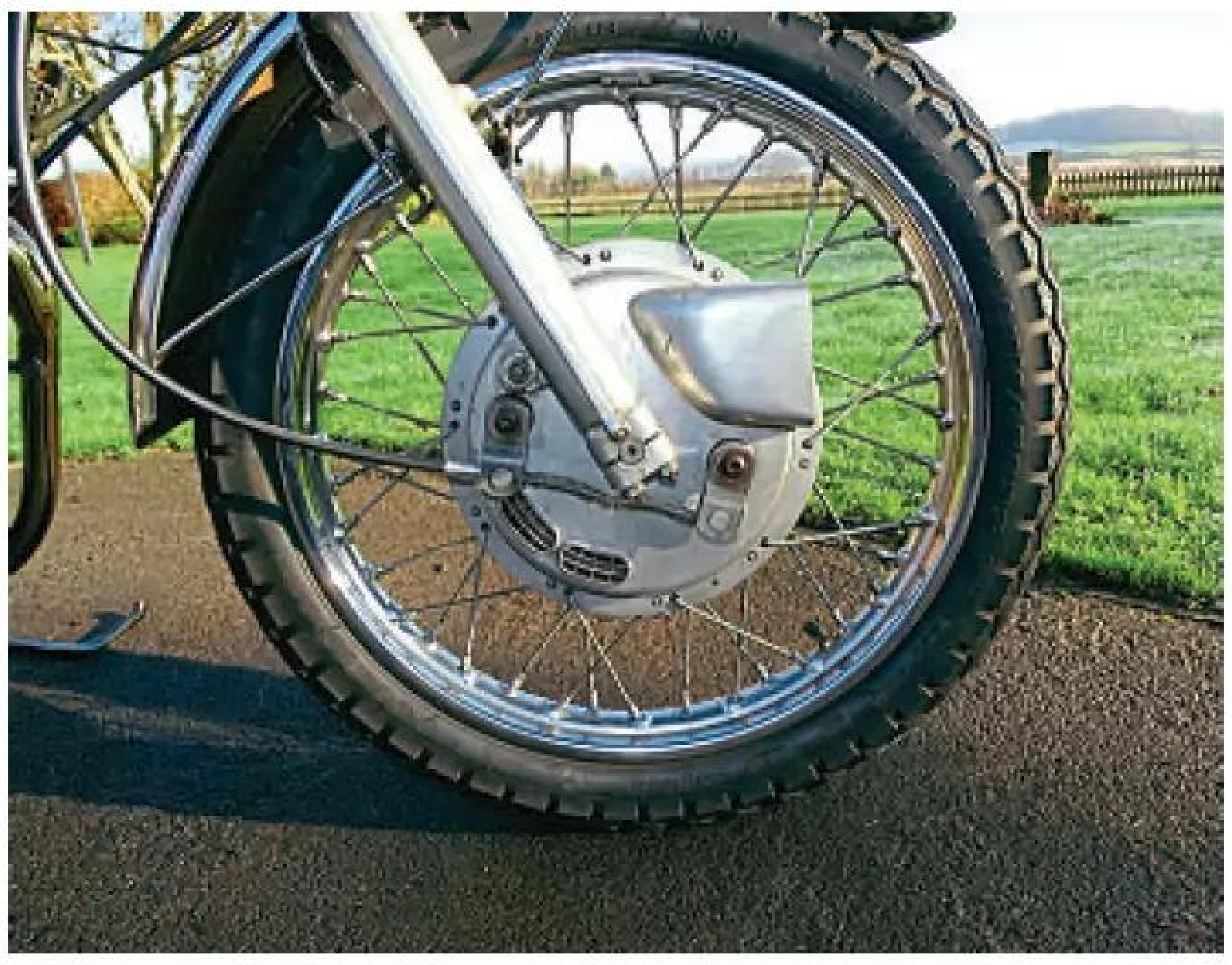




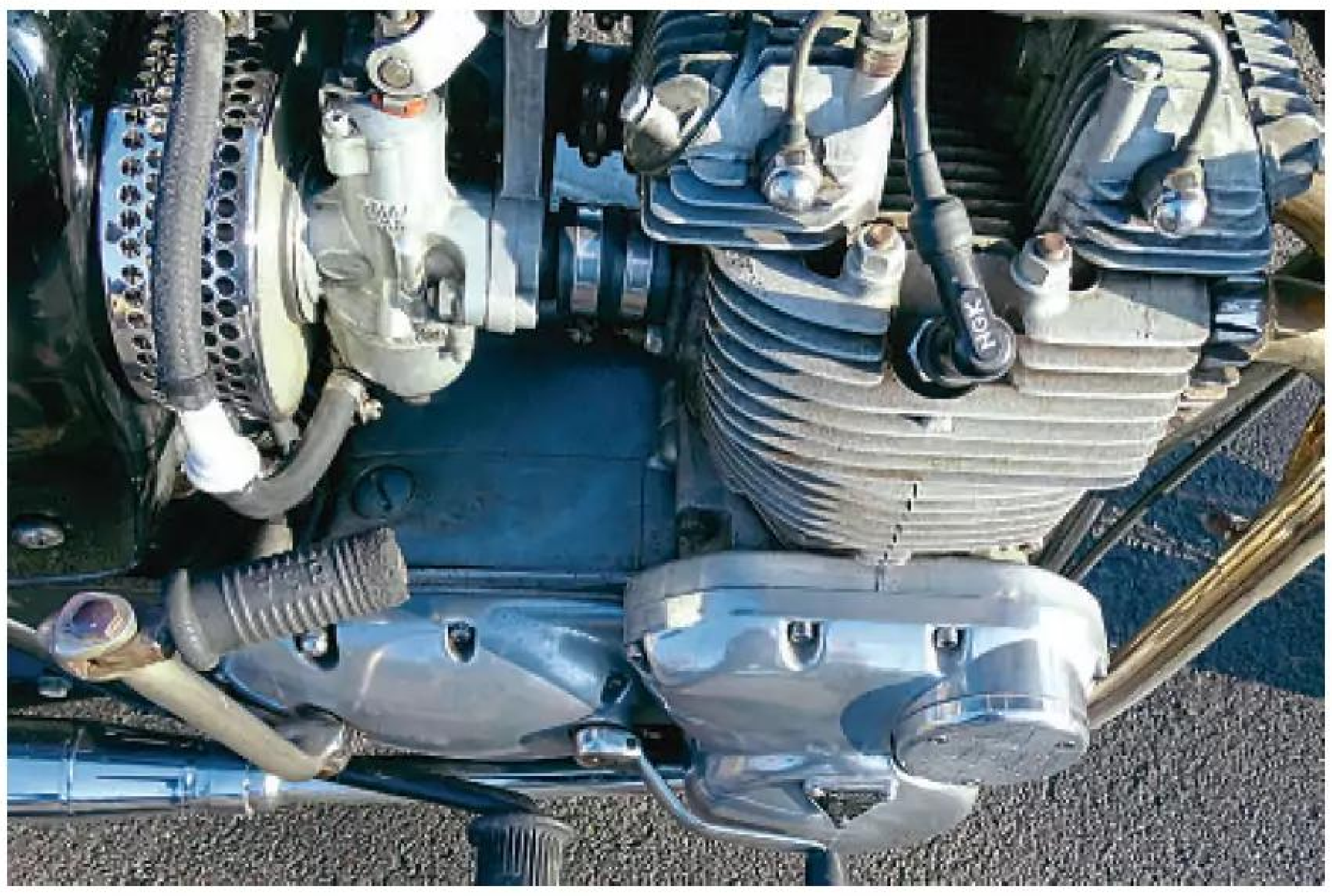


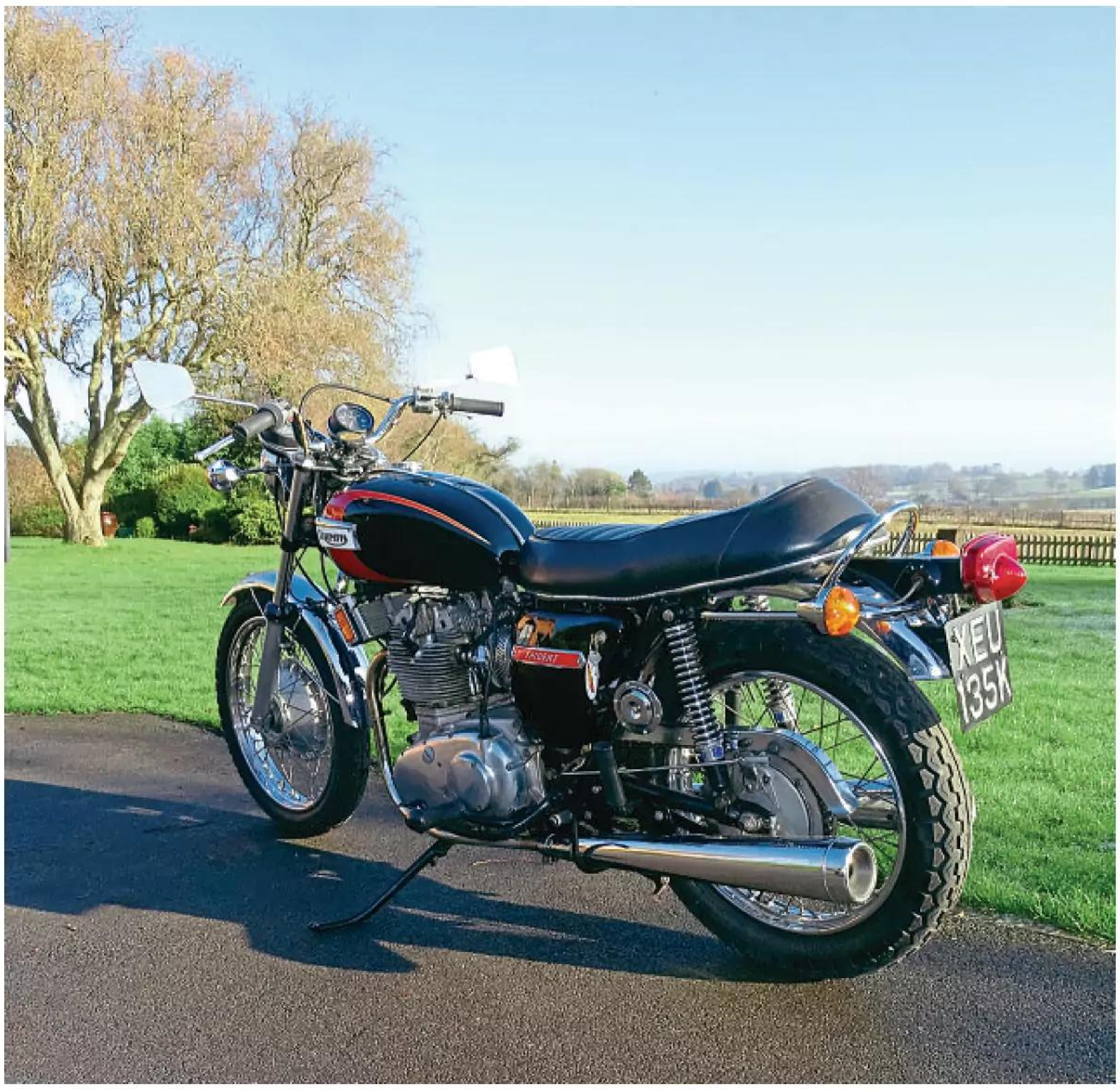
TRIUMPH
TRIDENT

anchor, my reasoning was that this is actually a BSA, really, so does not count. In any case, Chris simply regarded me with the tolerance which all traders develop after decades of dealing with misinformed idiots and threatened me with a cup of his very own, very special coffee. How could I refuse?

Ah, pride and a fall. Which is of course a problem with journalists who consider themselves to be expert. Simply because I was unaware of drum-stoppered, five-speed Tridents does not mean that they don't exist. How often have we all read stories claiming to be factual, but which are in fact anything but? Very often, in my case, and with increasing frequency.

Research is a wonderful thing. After my entirely delightful time with the triple,





MY OTHER BIKE'S A MOPED

"Chris fired up the Trident. It hadn't run for a while, so it took several mighty swings. I watched. This is the best approach to starting Tridents – let someone else do it. Being a T150, the middle carb's tickler requires either a tickling stick or a miraculously lengthy finger to depress it..."

I got hold of John Young, who knows more about Tridents than I know about everything put together, and asked him to reveal the facts. While he was doing so, I dived into my own archives (a big, rusty filing cabinet filled with folders of photos) and rootled through everything I could find about the earlier five-speeders. This bike – which has matching numbers and is considerably original – is, of course, correct. By the time John had provided full documentation (parts lists, handbooks...), I had read up and felt duly humbled.

Did you know that Triumph fitted the five-speed box to its twins at the same time as its triples? Why, I wonder, did BSA offer the five-speeder on its Rocket Three (which never had factory disc brakes, so far as I can tell) but not on its own twins? I know the answer, but...

Confession time. I've remarked before about just how few big bike kicks my increasingly ancient right leg has in it. And although each cylinder on a Trident is roughly the same capacity as, say, a Triumph 250 Blazer, it's much more painful to kick over. Think of all the resistance caused by the inertia of all that crankshaft mass: three pistons, three conrods, and a crankshaft of considerable beefiness. This is what puts me off owning another triple – even a T160, although I could be tempted by one of those if I could believe it would actually start itself...

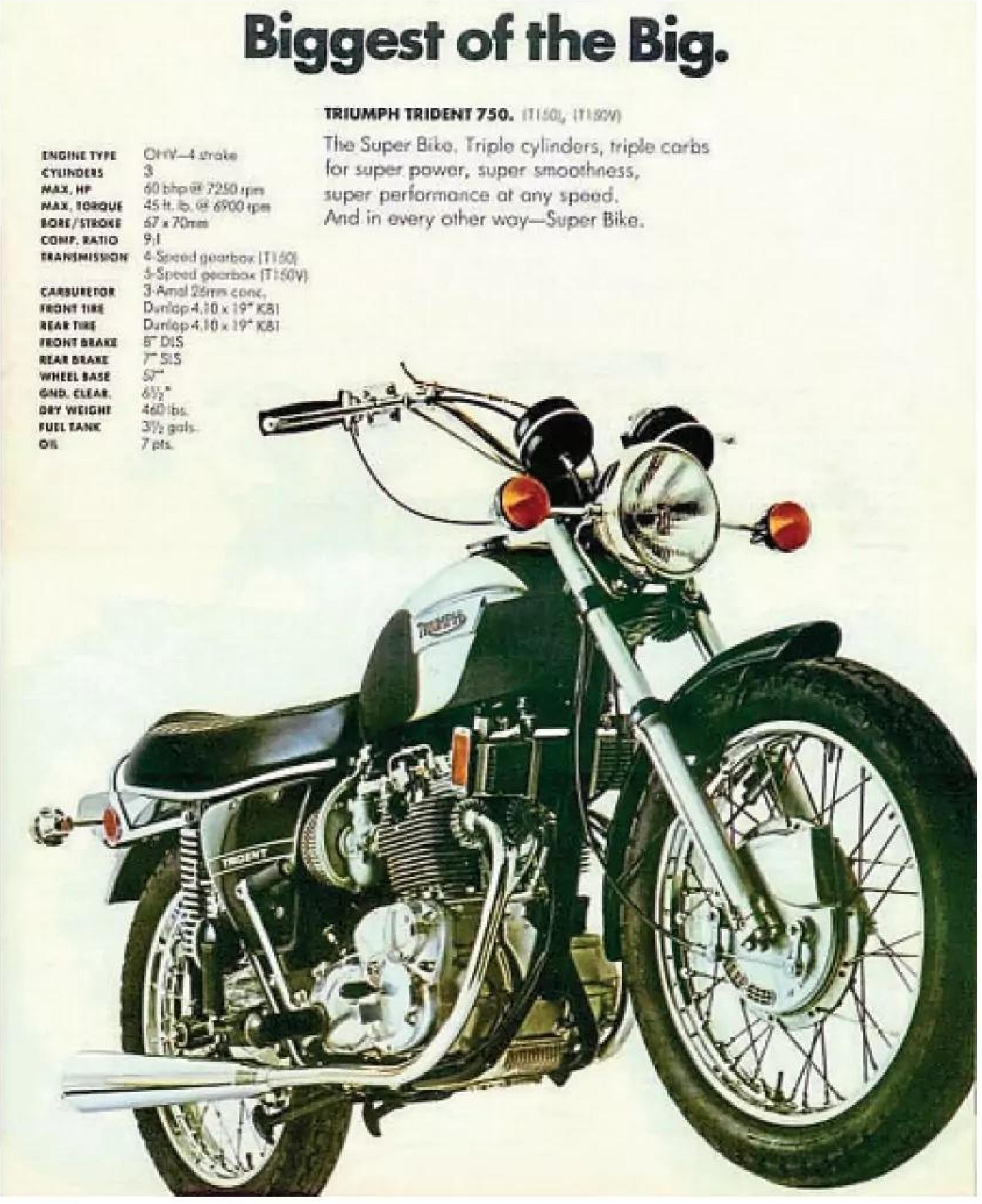
All of which makes a very sound reason for delighting in riding around on Tridents belonging to anyone else.

Chris fired up the Trident. It hadn't run for a while, so it took several mighty swings. I watched. This is the best approach to starting Tridents – let someone else do it. Being a T150, the middle carb's tickler requires either a tickling stick or a miraculously lengthy finger to depress it. One of my own T150 Tridents (a 1975 example imported from the USA) boasted a neat lever by the centre carb, possibly stolen from a T160, but apart from that I was amused to see that Chris simply tickled the outer carbs and – hey presto! – the bike fired up on two cylinders. They all do that, sir.

An aside: the one and only T160 Trident to pass through my hot and sweaties as an actual Shed dweller came back from the USA in the early 1990s, and among its many peculiarities, its middle carb, although some kind of Amal, had started life on a two-stroke trail bike...

No problems here, however. After very few seconds, the middle cylinder joined its neighbouring partners and that old familiar triple howl replaced the odd-sounding beat of a 240-degree twin. Even more wonderfully, the engine settled down to a relaxed idle, although relaxed probably isn't the best word to describe it.

As we all know, Tridents were designed with a diaphragm clutch to handle all ➡



Biggest of the Big.

TRIUMPH TRIDENT 750. (T150), (T150V)

The Super Bike. Triple cylinders, triple carbs for super power, super smoothness, super performance at any speed. And in every other way—Super Bike.

ENGINE TYPE	OHV—4 stroke
CYLINDERS	3
MAX. HP	60 bhp @ 7250 rpm
MAX. TORQUE	45 ft. lb. @ 6900 rpm
BORE/STROKE	67 x 70mm
COMP. RATIO	9:1
TRANSMISSION	4-Speed gearbox (T150) 5-Speed gearbox (T150V)
CARBURETOR	3-Amal 26mm conc.
FRONT TIRE	Dunlop 4.10 x 19" K81
REAR TIRE	Dunlop 4.10 x 19" K81
FRONT BRAKE	8" DLS
REAR BRAKE	7" SLS
WHEEL BASE	57"
GND. CLEAR.	6½"
DRY WEIGHT	460 lbs.
FUEL TANK	3½ gals.
OIL	7 pts.

TRIDENT

TRIUMPH
OWNERS HANDBOOK
FOR
1972 MODELS
45 CU. IN. (750 C.C.) TRIPLE
TRIDENT T150, T150 V.
U.S.A. EDITION
TRIUMPH
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OWNERS HANDBOOK
FOR
1972 MODELS
750 C.C. TRIPLE
TRIDENT T150, T150 V.
U.K. & GENERAL EXP. EDITION

that hot bhp, as was Norton's Commando, although the Triumph device appears to this untrained eye to be a little more sophisticated. That's also the case when using it, as very few Triumph triples appear to feature the over-centre 'pop' diaphragm spring effect which has been a talking point on all the Commandos I've owned down the years. And whereas the Commando clutch simply replaced the coil spring-loaded pressure plate with a diaphragm spring, retaining the familiar stack of plain and friction plates, the Trident design uses just two plates in an altogether more modern design. Functionally? It's no longer a really good idea to free off the clutch before starting the engine. This is progress, we were told in 1968.

Which is why this Trident just clicked into first gear, with no drag nor indeed drama. It is easy to enjoy Triumph's handsome triple. It really is.

So, there you are, sitting with the clutch in, engine ticking over in that odd half-a-six way, both feet flat on the ground, ready to add a light coating of seasonal road salt to the previously immaculate chromework. Proud Owner is standing nearby, his usual calm, trusting, benign expression turning slowly to an increasingly concerned stare, maybe with a light dusting of panic. Curious.

Which is the moment that I must remind you, gentle reader, that Triumph sidestands of the 1970s do not feature an ignition cut-out. I need say no more at this point.

Although I always feel that the triples are taller than the twins when I'm riding them, in fact both share the same seat height at 31in or so (the 'or so' allowing for replacement or merely soggy rear shocks). Once sitting down, the flat feet at the ends of my weedy 28in inside legs sit appropriately flat on the ground, and although the triple is heavier than the twins at 460lb (209kg) compared to the 1972 T120V's 390lb, it is still very easy to move around. Rather easier than, say, a contemporary Honda CB750, which is an inch taller and weighs in at 480lb. The ability to person-handle a bike around the place is increasingly important as our knees age, and at no point did the Trident feel in any danger of toppling. Which is just as well. Both stands are easy to operate without extreme exertion, and both are very stable.

But I still don't enjoy kicking them over very much.

There is a school of thought which insists that the triples are at their bend-swinging best when riding on Dunlop's TT100 tyres. The hoops fitted to this machine were labelled as Dunlop Roadmasters, appear to share a tread pattern with the old TT100, and certainly suited the bike well enough – not that there was much in the way of heroic derring-do that day. All available corners and bends may have been tackled at main road speeds, but that's hardly a test of the tyres. I was more concerned about the amount of salt on the roads, as on that early January morning the temperature was below freezing and there was ice at the edges of the roads. I was also togged up for the 200-plus mile ride home, which I hope explains away my portly Bibendum impersonation. Long johns, armoured jeans

"Long johns, armoured jeans and overtrousers, coupled with thermals, a T-shirt, a sweatshirt and a fleecy cardigan inside a heavy jacket with a liner does not a fashion statement make. But at least I stayed warm, although my comedy waddle as I moved the bike around must have been entertaining to observe."

and overtrousers, coupled with thermals, a T-shirt, a sweatshirt and a fleecy cardigan inside a heavy jacket with a liner does not a fashion statement make. But at least I stayed warm, although my comedy waddle as I moved the bike around must have been entertaining to observe.

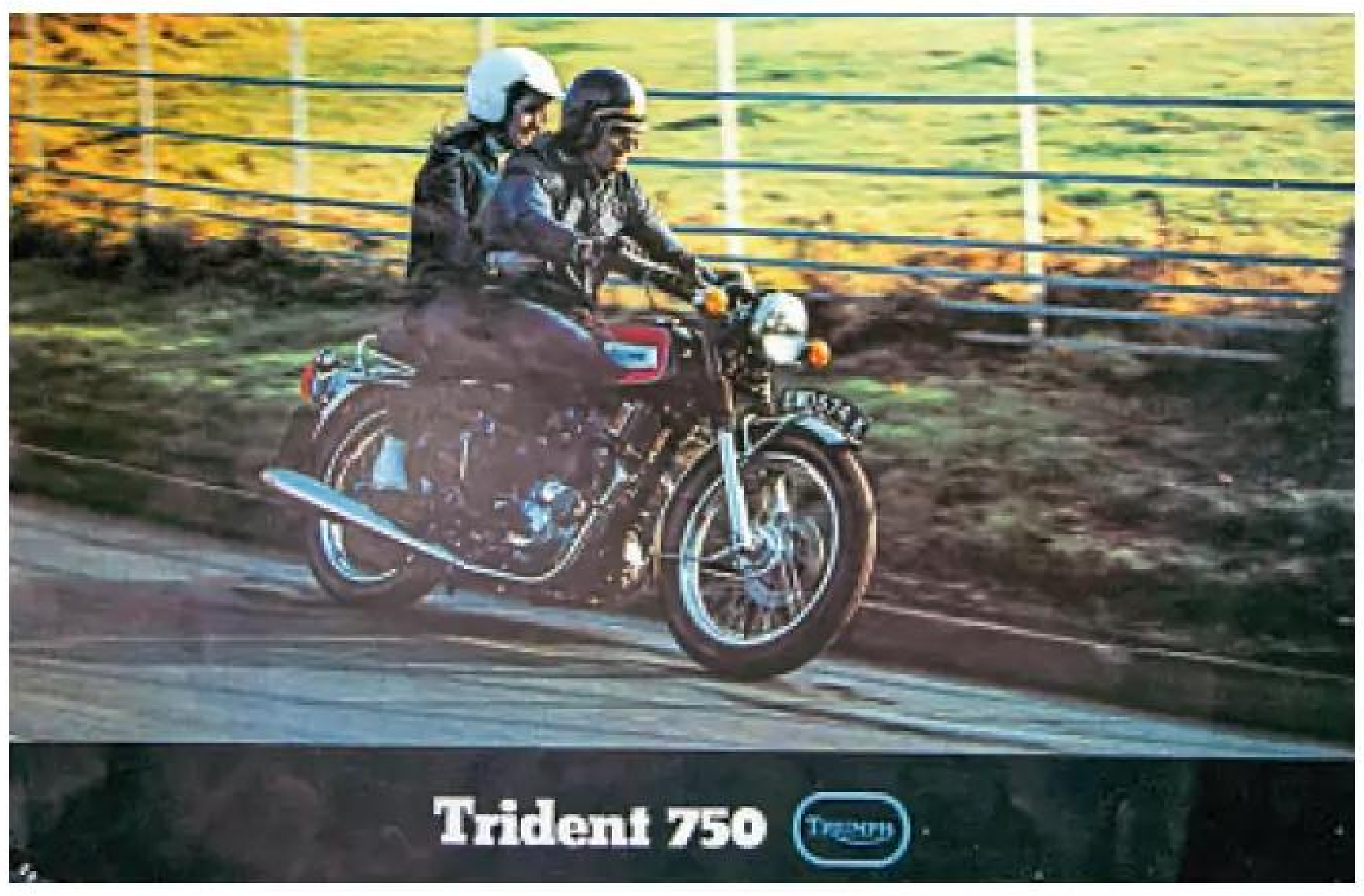
Let's talk a bit about the gearbox thing. For starters, I must say that I've never had any real concerns about riding the earlier four-speed triples. Any more than I can get flustered by four-speed Norton Commandos. The five-speeder's gearbox sprocket is listed as having lost a tooth, but top gear is direct on both versions, and all the intermediate ratios are different – as you would expect.

On the road? It sounds obvious, but the real difference is that you change gear more often on the five-speeder. Is changing gear difficult or unpleasant? No, of course it isn't, so that is no concern either. So – for this rider at least – it's a matter of personal taste. I like long gears. I enjoy the flexibility of a big engine with decent spreads of both torque and power, which is certainly the case with the Trident. I would expect that were a chap to run a five-speed Trident down a drag strip, it would be quicker accelerating than the four-speeder, but… really? In 2025?

I've ridden a couple of Commandos fitted with five-speed gearboxes and felt that they'd lost some of that torque monster's charm. They may have been a little faster on a track, but I don't ride on tracks. The simple fact is that the added ratio is just that. An attempt by Triumph to appear more modern, perhaps.

And it has long been my view that the disc front brake was added for similar reasons. Certainly, the drum stopper on this machine was very good. Smooth and progressive, and so far as I could see it was fade-free too. These conical hubs have something of a poor reputation – mostly for consistency. When they're bad they're ineffective, but when they're good they're very good, as was fortunately the case here.

The early single disc device which replaced the drum? Modern pads are better than the originals, but they're not entirely inspiring, to be honest. Especially on a bike with the mass and performance of a Trident. Although it is simple enough – if not very cheap – to radically upgrade them.



It's not easy to confirm that the 'bars on this bike are stock US market bends, but they are certainly comfortable. As is the slim export fuel tank, which not only looks very good, but also allows a satisfying glimpse of the carbs and the top of the engine while allowing plenty of room to flap your legs about, should the need arise. Which it should not on an icy January road. The riding position is certainly considerably comfortable, especially if the rider is dressed up like the Michelin Man's more corpulent brother. Very relaxed all round, although for personal preference I would prefer a set of footrests with a little more rear-set to them. At least where they are they match the tall 'bars and slim tank very well.

And being a 1972 machine, this has the earlier silencers – the megaphones which preceded the cigars. And they do sound very good. Not loud, but beefy, and with a good bass tone to counteract the valvegear thrash typical of the Trident's all-alloy top end.

Enough of that. On the road? Riding a Trident is the best reason for owning one. Ownership is immersive, as is the case with several quirky and unusual motorcycles. The engine's complexity is well-known, and it still feels like something of a miracle that it ever made it to production. Three crankcase halves? Really?

I like these engines, but every time I pull out a schematic or an exploded diagram I ask myself how it could possibly have been cheaper to tool up for this amazing device than to produce an all-new SOHC design, like Honda's original CB750. With a clean sheet of paper on the drawing board, I have no doubt that Triumph's engineers could have produced an equally accomplished piece of machinery, preferably a triple, and fitted with an effective electric start. The build cost of the triple 'Tiger-and-a-half' must have been astounding. I'd not be surprised to learn that the triples sold at a loss, sadly.

Performance is excellent. Some vibration is apparent – more than you might expect – but none of it is unpleasant. It's more a sensation of power being generated than a concern for the dentistry. And the engine really does feel powerful. It sounds like it's revving rather harder than it actually is – a feature of having half as many pistons again as a big twin. Meanwhile, the Lucas switches are as non-intuitive as they always are, and I can never remember which side the indicators are on, or which way to stab the little plastic levers, up or down. I would suggest that this is an old age thing but suspect it's just a reminder of what was a dim idea in the first place. Two identical lever switches and four identical buttons? All unlabelled? Who thought of that?

Tridents are truly great motorcycles. Every single time I ride an example which has been well set-up, I am reminded of how surprisingly good they are to ride. As you would surely expect, my thoughts turn to finding one for myself. The Shed has provided leaky, damp housing for a couple of Rocket 3s, as well as at least a half-dozen Tridents. They have all had great potential. But… that's honesty for you.

They have all been potentially great bikes and I've enjoyed riding them all – when they were running properly. And here I was again, sailing along without a care in the world on a charming, charismatic motorcycle with great character and quite enough performance in all areas to be seriously satisfying.

But, of course, this machine belongs to someone else. I'm afraid that's become a recurring theme. Every so often I scour the ads for a T160 in tiptop condition at a bargain price, with a semi-serious eye for a purchase. I liked the looks of one of them so much that I dug out old photos of Smoky Joe, my own T160, because photos do indeed jog my memory. I remember one spirited ride across a chunk of North Wales when it returned 30mpg (petrol) and 30mpp (oil, pints of). I loved the ride, because it was a splendid beast, but its splendidness reduced the less I rode it.

> ***"I can never remember which side the indicators are on, or which way to stab the little plastic levers, up or down. I would suggest that this is an old age thing but suspect it's just a reminder of what was a dim idea in the first place. Two identical lever switches and four identical buttons? All unlabelled? Who thought of that?"***

You read that correctly. If I rode the Trident to the office every couple of days and used it for longer journeys when the big fairing and hard luggage of its partner of the day in The Shed – a Norton Commander – was unnecessary, then it was reliable and predictable. Leave it standing for a few weeks and…

In fact, my experience of Trident ownership is very like that of rotary Norton ownership. They reward regular use and become increasingly cranky if neglected. Like the Nortons, Tridents are seriously involving machines. They have loads of quirks and charms and foibles and eccentricities. There is a vast amount of expert material and lore out there in which proud owners can immerse themselves – and an excellent owners' club too, as well as fine spares supply. If you're after a passion, rather than an occasional flip along the fast roads of nostalgia, then this may be the perfect machine for it. They're also very shiny, so can withstand a huge amount of polishing, should you enjoy that sort of thing.

And more than any other British machine I can think of, Tridents have VROOOM! You can't say that every day. CBG

L.P. Williams Est. 1976

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Just what the hell is flat track?

Dirt track, or flat track, racing has a large classic element to it, just like the golden era when Triumphs and Beezas were racing week by week in the USA. Now you can have a go, on a Royal Enfield, taught by a multiple champion Gary Birtwistle. We sent Maria to get it sideways, and she found the skills you learn are wider reaching than just on the dirt…

Words by Maria Hull, with **photography by** Jamie Morris (jamiemorrisphoto.com). **Big thanks to** Royal Enfield and Dirt Craft for inviting us to their flat track school – to have a go yourself, go to dirtcraft.co.uk

C*lassic Bike Guide* **WAS LUCKY** enough to be invited to the Royal Enfield Slide School with Dirt Craft's Gary Birtwistle – so Matt sent me! Gary is a multiple UK and European flat track champion, and I've been lucky enough to have attended one of his previous schools. This time we were off to the Iwade speedway track in Sittingbourne, riding the modified Royal Enfield Guerilla. We arrived on an absolute scorcher of a morning and were met by the other wannabe flat trackers to start a day of 'just turn left'. I've done a couple of flat track schools before so had a fairly good idea of what to expect.

Our bikes were based on the new Royal Enfield Guerilla but with a few subtle changes for the task ahead, including 19in wheels, no headlight, instrument panel, fairing and no front brake. This wasn't news to me, but several of the other guests exchanged glances.

We got kitted up with the flat track essentials, a left steel shoe crucial to make a 'tripod' of the two wheels and your left foot when cornering, and then Gary got down to teaching us this and other concepts behind flat track. The first session was all about the track and getting a feel for it and how the bikes reacted. There was a small slalom for us to weave through at the start/finish where we could feel the different grip and how the bike handled.

I was pretty apprehensive before we went out as the road biker in me was dreading the loose surface. The track had to be watered before we went out each time as the weather was so hot and it was just drying out so quickly. Gary explained that the darker patches of the track were where the grip was, and the lighter, where it's ➡

3
4
7

ROYAL ENFIELD

SCHOOL
7

ROYAL ENFIELD
RST
2

DIRT CRAFT
FOX
RST
3
2

drier, would be more slippery. He said that during races, the racers chase the darker patches and end up a lot further out on the track trying to find grip. We watched the steam coming off the track as the tractor and bowser watered it. It wasn't long before it had dried out almost completely before it was our turn. As I was in group three, I spent most of the morning navigating the very loose and dry track – yet the bikes handled surprisingly well. I was never going to break any speed records, but my bike didn't react as unpredictably as expected. That in itself gave me a glimmer of confidence to push it a little harder on each lap.

After the initial session we had three or four more goes at perfecting the correct body position and technique, with Gary giving us all a couple of pointers before each session to work on. The first tips were to have your right butt cheek off the right-hand side of the seat and push the

"I had such trust in the bike, the road, and myself and my ability. You don't need to want to race flat track or even really be any good at it to do the slide school. The boost it gives is worth its weight in gold."

bike down towards your left foot. Your left foot (with the steel shoe on) is on the floor and acts as a tripod, keeping the bike from disappearing under you. This takes a lot of time to get even slightly comfortable with, and I can't say I was completely okay with it, but it gets easier and, crucially, I was feeling why it works.

Next was to have your arms and hands held up on top of the 'bars rather than level with them to give you more control and feel of what the front was doing. You need to be right up on the front of the tank as far as you can get to keep the bike level and balanced. I was concentrating on having my arms held up and forgot about the tank until a few laps in. Once I remembered, it made the world of difference and made it all feel like it had come together. I found it difficult to get my arms up on the handlebars and felt I just wasn't tall enough to get up there, but with time I suspect it was more a feeling, and that it would have improved.

Next, Gary came onto the track with us and led each person in turn so we could follow and see how it should look to further perfect our technique. This is when I found out I was hanging off completely the wrong side of the bike! I had my left butt cheek off the left side instead of right cheek off the right-hand side. Once Gary had pointed this out, I feel I took quite a backwards step as I had to tip the bike so far down to get my foot even close to the floor – and yet I could see why his way would work better. It was just a case of getting comfortable with it… it's so much more different to road riding!

It took quite a few laps to remember all the things Gary had explained and to put them all together until it felt right. ➡

But each time I got a bit right, I could feel it was right, and it then seemed to store in my mind to allow me to work on the next bit. Once I had them all right, it made everything feel right.

The final sessions of the day were following a demonstration from Gary of the proper racing line for flat track. Rather than following the oval round, we needed to be coming in from the far right edge of the track near the hoarding, rear braking and sliding the back in so we were almost pointing in the direction we needed to come out, then back on the gas to power slide back out of the corner. The aim was to create a kind-of triangle at the top of the bend and apex the corner as you came out.

There was no way I was going to manage all that. Thankfully, Gary just wanted us to practise coming into the corner through cones (placed about at the top of the triangle) and getting on the power and sliding our way to the apex and along the straight. This is the point where I lost my confidence and felt the slowest I'd been all day. It just didn't feel right.

We did a few sessions of this, and I wanted to quit on the first one – but didn't. And I was glad because, corner by corner, it started to come to me, and I got the hang of it. I wasn't the fastest, nor will I be racing flat track any time soon, but I was out there, and I was gaining confidence with my bike moving around underneath me, with what I felt was control.

My Dirt Craft flat track day was non-stop, exhausting and baking hot, but I came away with more experience and confidence. I think I had already beaten a few demons at the other schools I'd been to, so I went into this one with more confidence, but still as a road rider. Riding on such a loose surface all day was daunting, and I think that is what held me back. I didn't want to fall off in front of all those people, particularly being 'a girl.' It turns out, however, the day had indeed filled me with more assurance. The next morning, I shot off up the road on my Ducati Scrambler because I knew there was grip. I felt that if I came to some gravel or crud in the road, I knew how the bike would feel and react, and that, actually, I was able to deal with it and I didn't need to tense up and brace for impact. Riding on a track so loose and potentially unpredictable meant that my road riding was absolute bliss… that ride was one of my most enjoyable. I had such trust in the bike, the road, and myself and my ability. You don't need to want to race flat track or even really be any good at it to do the slide school. The boost it gives is worth its weight in gold. I've always thought that every car driver should have to do a motorcycle test because it makes you such a better driver. In the same vein, having a go at flat track riding is an absolute must for any bike rider; you'll come away with so much more confidence in every aspect of riding. And the fun you have is the icing on the cake. CBG

ROYAL ENFIELD
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6

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Kawasaki Z750

If you grew up in the 1980s and 1990s with inline four-cylinder bikes screaming, Bandits pulling wheelies, and loud end cans, the Kawasaki Z750 is one of the unsung examples. It's a classic in all aspects of the meaning, and it's cheap...

Words and pictures by Oli Hulme

THE BIG SELLERS IN MOTORCYCLE showrooms during the late 1990s were not fairing-clad race replica sports bikes. Adventure steeds, or even retro twins, had yet to become mainstream. The bikes we saw the most of were mid to large capacity inline-fours. Bikes like the Suzuki Bandit, the Yamaha Fazer and Honda Hornet, and a few Kawasaki Zeds.

The theory was to make a bike that people could actually use on modern roads. And the recipe was simple: take a sportsbike engine from previous years, retune for less top end but more midrange power, lower the gearing, pop into a cheap-to-make steel frame with budget suspension, and keep prices low for maximum bang for your buck. They sold by the bucket.

Over time, as they weren't anything special, they faded away from owners' hearts. Today, 30 years later, these bikes are not just cheap to buy – you can easily grab a 600 Fazer or Bandit for less than £1000 – but they are also 'classics,' in the eyes of insurance companies at least, and one can sit happily alongside a Velocette on your multi-bike policy. And if the bike was made before 2001, the VMCC recognises it as a classic too.

For the classic rider, these 'naked' bikes can be well worth considering as an alternative turn-key ride, coming as they did before catalytic converters and ABS, but still offering a relatively sophisticated and reliable riding experience.

After being the first out of the traps with its most authentic-looking Zephyr range, by the late 1990s Kawasaki had largely missed the boat with its own naked fours, the biggest offering being the rather dull 750cc ZR-7. This had knocked around for the best part of a decade, largely ignored. It had the last iteration of Kawasaki's twin cam air-cooled engine that had been born in the Z1 in 1972. The ZR-7 wasn't a bad motorcycle, but it wasn't massively exciting, or pretty either. Today, you would be hard pushed to spend more than £1500 for a ZR-7 compared to its smaller sibling, the ever-useful, reliable as a hammer and cheaper-to-run 500cc ER-5 twin, hailing from the GPZ500S. But that's for another day.

So, in 2005, Kawasaki got busy. It gained a new chief designer, of Mazda MX-5 fame, who helped the resurgence of a Kawasaki brand that stood out. And, having been rather left behind in the biggish naked four-cylinder stakes, the team came up with the Z750. It was a smaller brother to the bonkers four-exhaust-piped Z1000, which in turn had been developed from the ZX-10R sportsbike. To keep the Z750 price down, it had a steel frame, a set of non-adjustable 41mm forks and simple preload and rebound adjustments for the old-style Uni-Trak system's single rear shock. So far, so much like the ZR-7.

More inspiring upgrades included then fashionable lightweight six-spoke wheels shod with radial tyres (yes, oh young readers, this was still a good thing in the '90s), an anti-tamper ignition lock, decent but simple instrumentation, and an LED taillight at the back. The big difference was the new engine, a fuel-injected inline-four. The 748cc, liquid-cooled, 16-valve powerplant had elements from both the ZX-9R and more modern Z1000 and ZX-10R engines, with external looks improved. The 750 came with the same radiator as the Z1000 and many of the same dimensions as the bigger machine. Despite this, it was also cheaper than a Honda 600 Hornet.

The designers of the Z1000 had given it a stand-out love-or-hate 4-into-1-into-2-into-4 exhaust, but the 750 had a simple, if substantial, 4-1. The seat was an incongruous two-piece unit. The Z750 was soon joined by the more user-friendly Z750s, which came with a more substantial nose fairing and one-piece seat, making the bike more suitable for distance riding, if giving it a less aggressive appearance.

The Z750s on the road

The high spot of the Z750s is the engine, and what a fine thing it is. My normal frame of reference for a 750 is either my T140 Bonneville or 'Guzzi V7, both pushrod twins, with the 'Guzzi the more powerful machine at 47bhp. The twin cam Z750s motor produces more than twice that, a

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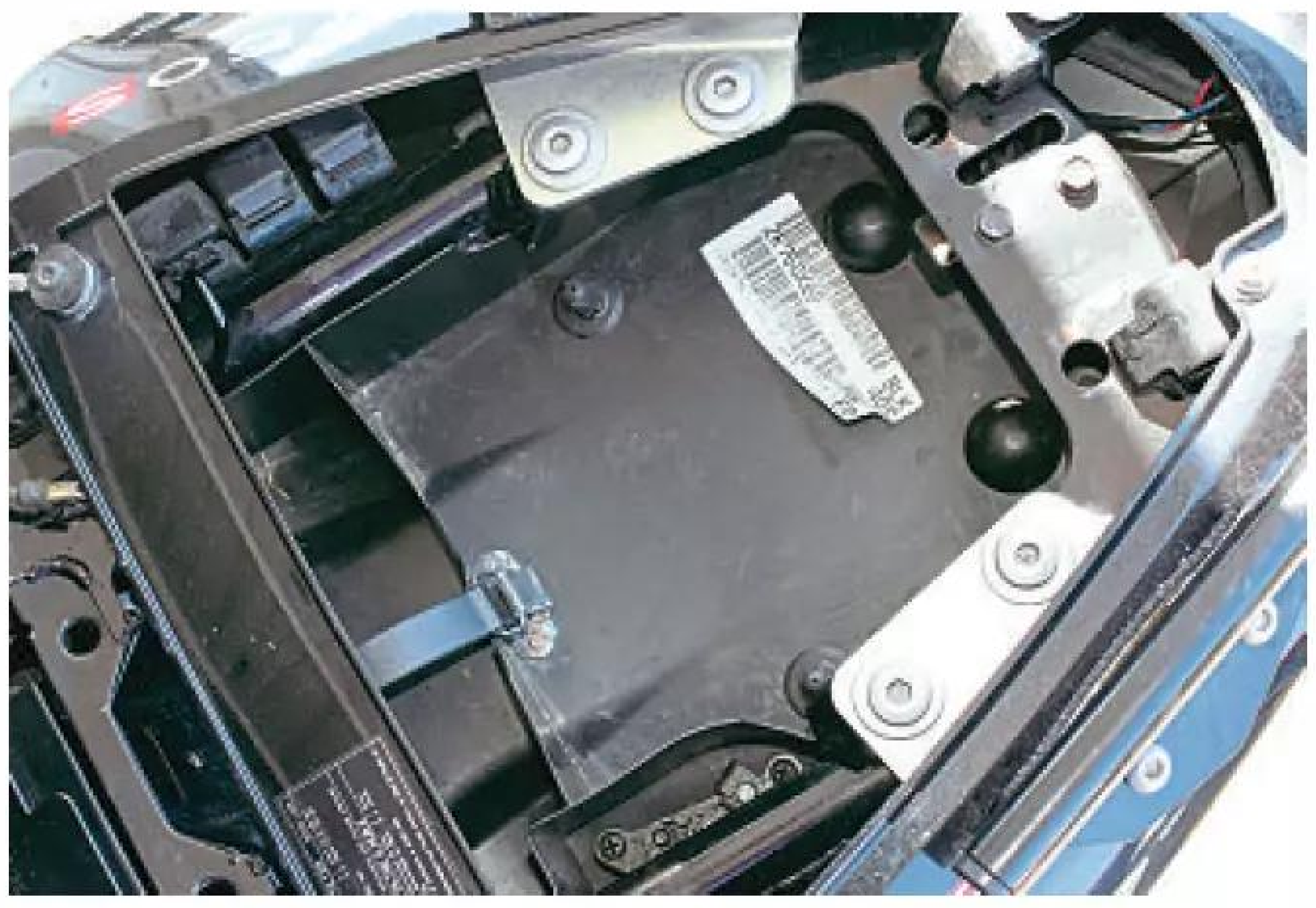


claimed 110bhp, though 25bhp less than the Z1000. This is a huge amount of power by comparison with my twins, and the way the Zed's power comes in is fascinating. There is lots of smooth power at low revs, and if you want more, you just roll back the throttle and there it is, absolutely buckets of it. At those higher revs under acceleration, the exhaust starts to growl deeply, too, which is nice. There is a little more vibration apparent at those higher revs to remind you that you are shifting a bit. The engine is the thing that makes the Z750s shine.

The nose fairing on the Z750s works well with the bike's relaxed sit-up-and-beg riding position, creating an impressive bubble of still air around your chest and dispersing the remaining air over the top of your crash helmet. This is good on long rides; however, the seat/footpeg/'bars dynamic did take a little getting used to. The seat is low enough for the shorter rider – at 5ft 10in tall, I can get my feet flat on the floor with my knees slightly bent, so a taller 6ft-plus rider might find it a little cramped, even though the official seat height is 32 inches. The seat's angle takes a little getting used to. If you stick your bum in the back of the rider's perch, you put much of your upper body weight on your wrists, but if you slide forward you can seriously feel the bumps, as you are sitting over the shock absorber. Dabbing it about from a standstill can be a little difficult. The engine gets quite hot and that heat is directed around the rider's calves, and tall boots are a better option than fashionable shorty boots in hot summer weather.

The engine was tuned to respond robustly at lower rpm, with lots to play with if you want to scratch it. Although the Z750s might fit in the same pigeonhole as a carb-equipped 600 or 750 four, the fuel coming through 34mm fuel-injected throttle bodies shows the vast leap forward in the way motorcycles work that such

> **“My normal frame of reference for a 750 is either my T140 Bonneville or ‘Guzzi V7, both pushrod twins, with the ‘Guzzi the more powerful machine at 47bhp. The twin cam Z750s motor produces more than twice that, a claimed 110bhp, though 25bhp less than the Z1000. This is a huge amount of power by comparison with my twins, and way the Zed’s power comes in is fascinating.”**

The last of the naked middleweight fours:

Suzuki Bandit

The Bandit could be the bike that started the craze for naked, monoshock sporty fours. Available first as a crazy-fast 400, with Japanese grey imports markedly faster and better made than Euro models, the Bandit soon inspired a 600, a 750 and a 1200, using detuned GSX-R DOHC four-cylinder engines. The Bandits were everywhere, being cheap, rapid, and easy to personalise with Renthal bars, twin headlights and noisy 4-1 exhausts. S models had a small nose fairing but did not capture the imagination of buyers. The Bandit was popular enough for owners to establish their own owners’ club and it was a sought-after machine among to in the street hooligan wing of motorcycling, especially in 1200cc format. Prices start at £800 for an early running model, with later revised frame models more highly priced, but the price of a Bandit is rising rapidly as nostalgia buying kicks in.

Honda Hornet

Honda’s Hornet was more respectable than the Bandit but also marginally faster and better made. It had a retuned 97bhp CBR600F motor, with carbs, and was bit revvy and vibratory to ride. Later models had a larger tank, while the high-level exhaust, while attractive, did make using throwover panniers difficult and reduced its touring potential. A Hornet S, made for a few years, had a nose fairing. The Hornet name survived and is now used on a 500 and 750 twin and a 1000cc four. Prices are low, with a tired Hornet 600 starting at £800.

Yamaha Fazer 600

Launched in 1998, the Fazer was the bestselling bike in the class in 1999. Fitted with a detuned and prettified Thundercat motor and R1 brakes, it was a long way from the pedestrian XJ600 it replaced. Enormous fun to ride, comfortable, fine handling, and rapid, it was very popular. Problems with the early model’s headlights saw many Fazers losing their nose fairings and being fitted with aftermarket headlights, and the fairing was redesigned to solve the problem on later models. An excellent motorcycle, killed by incoming Euro 3 regulations and replaced by the better but less exciting XJ6, a good early Fazer can be an excellent buy. Prices start at about £1200.

End times

By the end of the first decade of the 21st century, the naked four was running out of steam – not because people did not want them, but because there was now a cheaper way of meeting the demand for fast middleweights and those emissions regulations were getting harder to negotiate. 650 and 700 twins became the way to fill this lucrative market niche. The big four Japanese bike makers took to using twin-cylinder middleweight drivetrains. These ‘had more character’ but were cheaper to make as they used half the parts (two pistons, two injectors, two exhausts) and put them in frames that were lighter and cheaper than those on the fours. Honda named its naked 650 the CB650F, even though it was a twin. Manufacturers also started making these generic twin-cylinder engines in China and India, and they have ended up with many different badges on their tanks. Today, you will find the four-cylinder engine in bigger bikes, but the middleweight multi-cylinder engine has largely vanished. If you want to experience the last of the old-school middleweight fours, these are the bikes to have.

advances in technology provided. The six-speed gearbox is as good as you might expect from a Japanese manufacturer, though it is possibly a little difficult to find neutral on it when things are hot. Oil changes at least are made easier by an easy-to-access spin-off canister oil filter on the front of the engine, with hex head on the outside to make it easier to get on and off.

And all that power is handled readily by the basic but decent running gear. The Z750s is only a few kilos heavier than a V7, so it is easy to throw about, the big tyres soak up the ruts and grooves on my local roads like they’re not there and, despite being basic, the suspension does its job effectively. The twin two-pot Tokico calipers at the front grip the discs extremely well and the Kawasaki has the only rear brake pedal I’ve been able to use effectively in years, which is ironic because the front brake is usually all you need – in the dry, at least. There are adjustable levers and a welcome lack of unnecessary flashing displays, one benefit of the Z750s arriving before such things were deemed essential.

Out of production in 2007, the Z750s avoided the restrictions that Euro 3 regulations imposed too.

Bad points are minimal. The idiot lights are dim, and I frequently leave the indicators flashing. Getting the seat off is a right faff; you have to use an ignition key in a tiny hole under the rear mudguard and then wiggle the seat backwards. There is a handy hidey hole in there though, big enough for a sandwich and a can of pop. ➡

SPECIFICATION

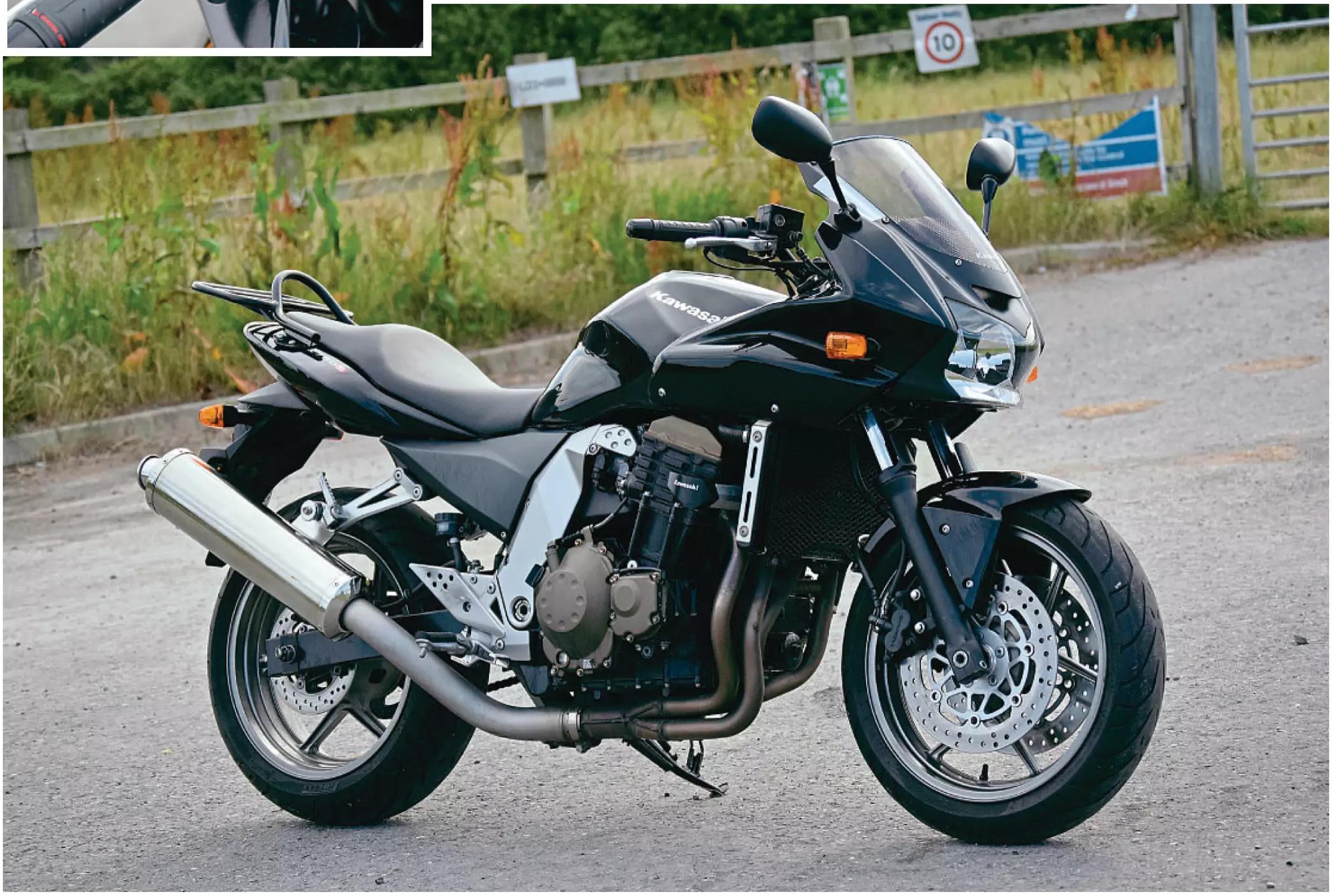
ENGINE: 748cc DOHC liquid-cooled four-cylinder **BORE/STROKE:** 68.4mm/50.9mm **CARBURATION:** Four 34mm EFI throttle bodies **COMPRESSION:** 11.3:1 **TRANSMISSION:** Six-speed gearbox, **IGNITION:** Digital **FRONT WHEEL:** 120/70-17 **REAR WHEEL:** 180/55-17 **FRONT SUSPENSION:** 41mm Hydraulic forks **REAR SUSPENSION:** Bottom link Uni-Trak, four-way rebound, seven-way preload **FRONT BRAKE:** Twin 300mm discs, twin two-pot Tokico calipers **REAR BRAKE:** Single 220mm single-piston caliper **LENGTH:** 82in (2080mm) **SEAT HEIGHT:** 32in ins (815mm) **WHEELBASE:** 56.1in (1425mm) **DRY WEIGHT:** 430lbs (195kg) **FUEL TANK:** 18 litre **POWER:** 110bhp **TOP SPEED:** 144mph

> **“And all that power is handled readily by the basic but decent running gear. The Z750s is only a few kilos heavier than a V7, so it is easy to throw about, the big tyres soak up the ruts and grooves on my local roads like they’re not there and, despite being basic, the suspension does its job effectively.”**

The immobiliser is an insurance premium cutting boost, but don’t lose the red key needed to reset it. That wonderful engine does eat the fat tyres, and they will not be cheap and will need replacing in pairs. And the basic-when-new suspension will now be useless, so budget for fork oil and service as a minimum and a rear shock most probably, so that’s £400 from Hagon or YSS. The side stand looks flimsy but probably isn’t, and there is no centre stand, sadly. What looks like cast aluminium frame panels on either side are in fact moulded plastic, and the square section swingarm looks like part of a piece of office furniture and could have done with a thicker coat of paint, given it is exposed to road muck. An aluminium arm would have been prettier.

The Z750S was only in production for a few years before being replaced by a more complicated upgrade and it never gained the profile of the Bandit, Fazer or Hornet – perhaps Kawasaki should, like its rivals, have given it a name rather than a number. Delivering a more modern riding experience than your average retro, the Z750s may well be deserving of taking up space in your shed if you are looking for something enervating, useful and fast. You won’t mistake it for a super-sports 600, but the Z750S is nimble enough, with generous cornering clearance, plenty of grip and reassuring handling. The only real downside is the lack of any classic-style character, but it might grow on you. The cheapest insurance quote I had for it was £88 a year fully comprehensive, which is ludicrous.

The Z750s came in black, silver or blue. Black is the classier colour but is easier to mark. Standard bikes have a groovy pair of cast alloy grab handles. Tired Z750S examples can be had for about £1800 and less worn examples go up to £2500. This near mint one, if you are interested, you might just find if you look in the CBG classifieds. Why sell it if it is so good? Well, garage space is limited, and there is this Triumph TR65 Thunderbird I’ve been offered… **CBG**



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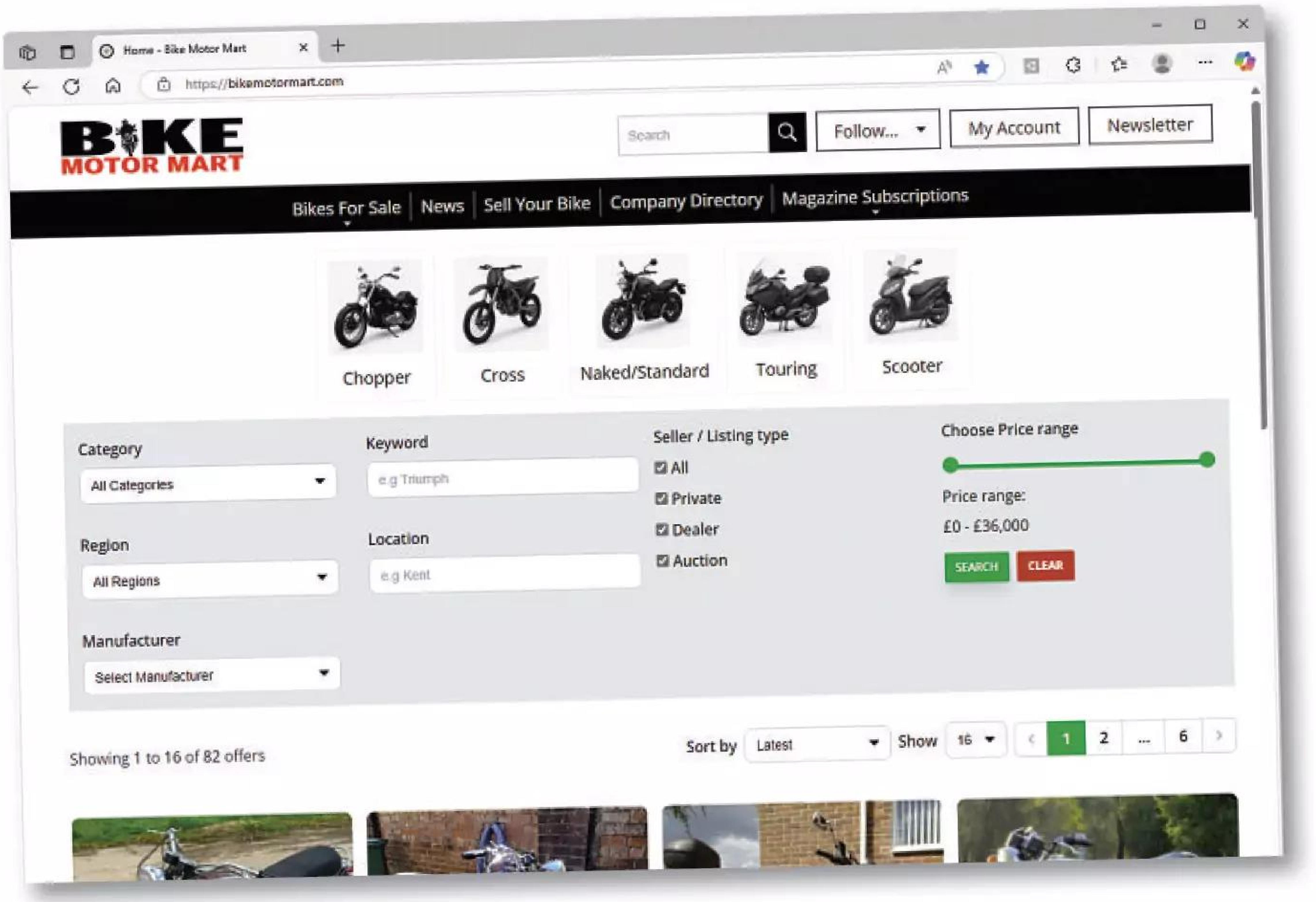

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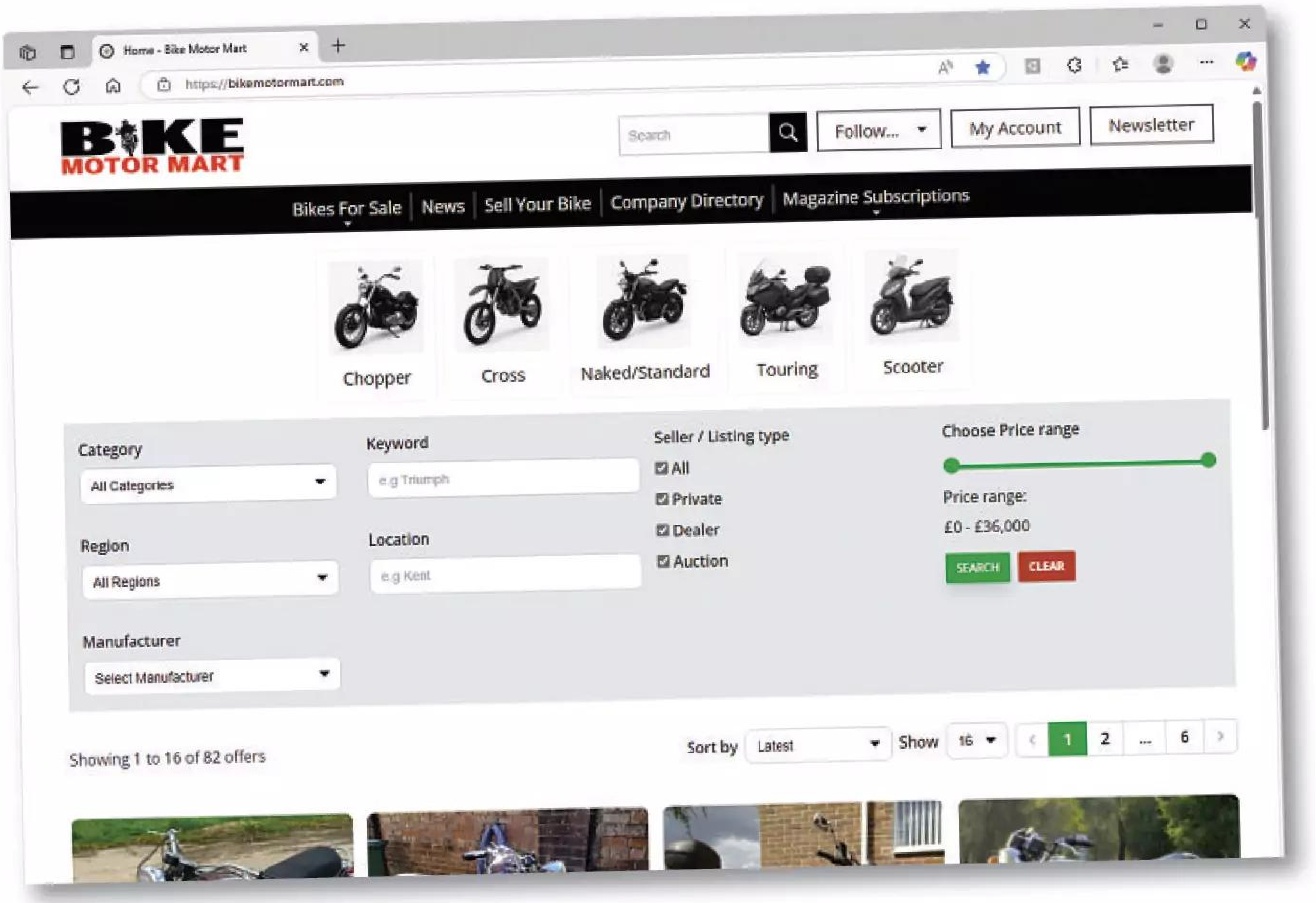

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1956, £5,750. Triumph 5T Speed Twin, pre unit, 1956. Easy starter, runs and rides as it should, 12v conversion, new chain, clutch rebuilt. Matching numbers, V5c & buff log book present, not concours but far better than oily rag condition, a good riding bike. £5750 or may take p/x Norfolk 07876704268. Please call 07876704268, Norfolk

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610

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Ariel 650 Huntmaster

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268

Ariel Huntmaster 650 FH

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BSA Super Rocket

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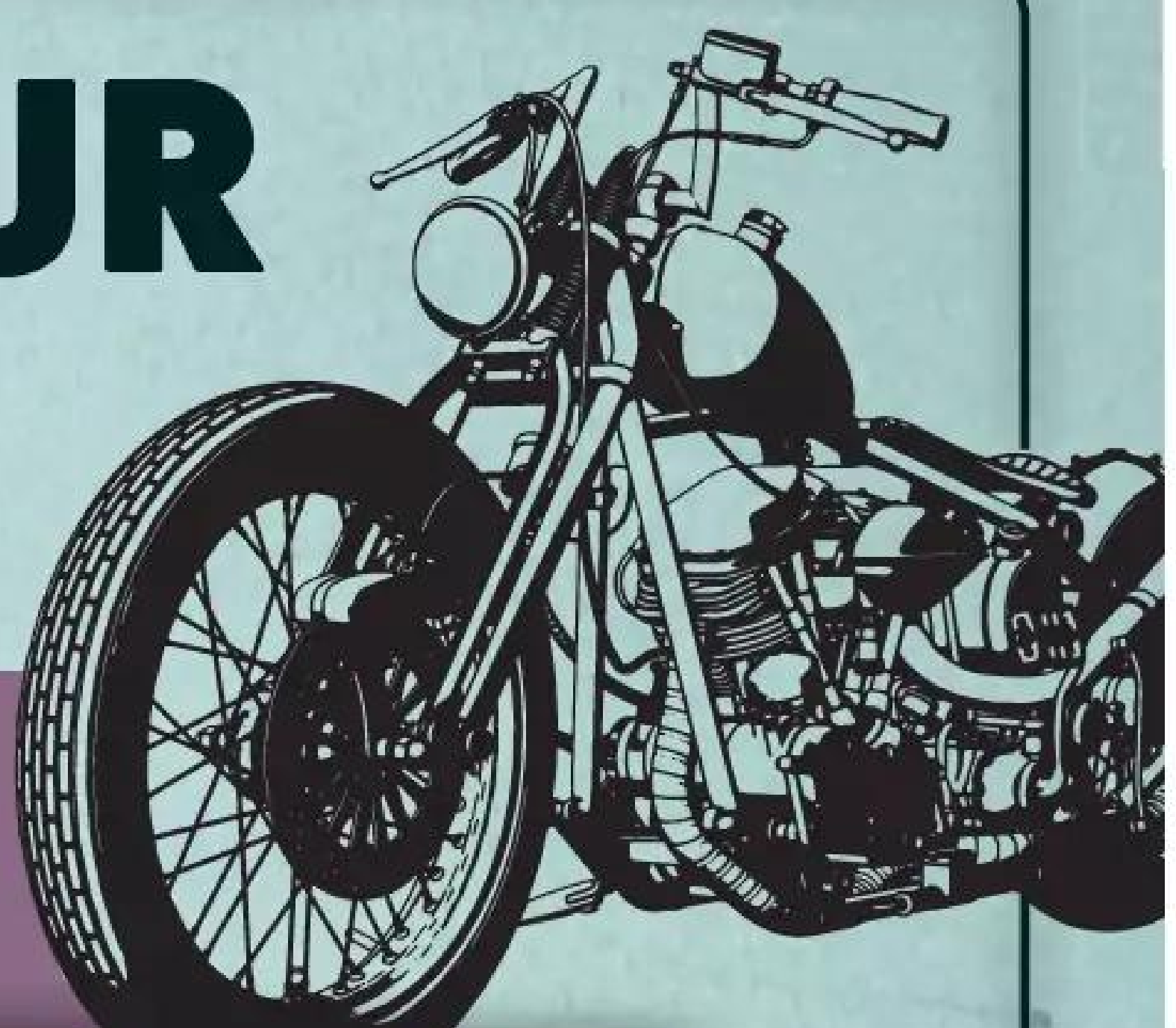

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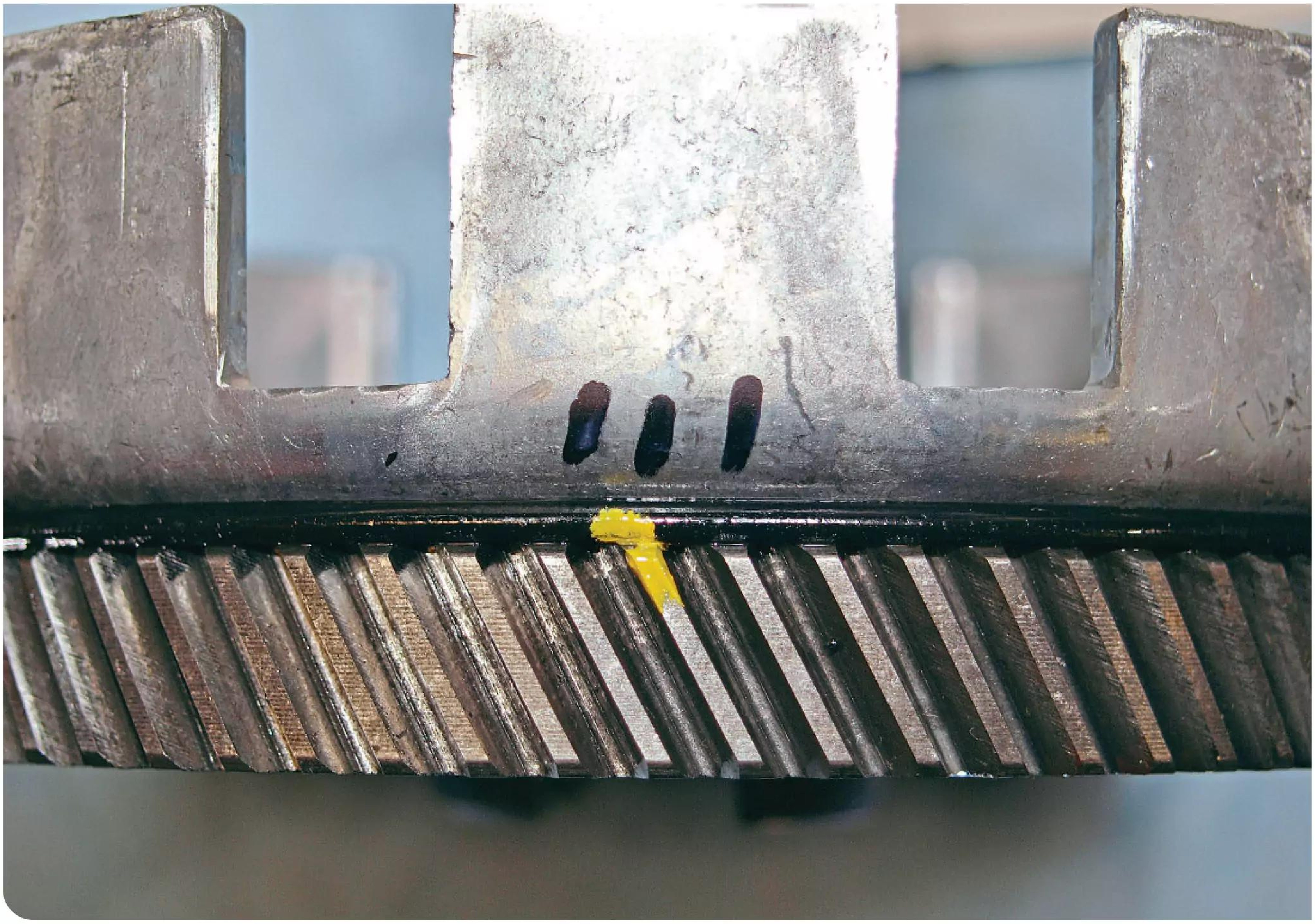
OFFER EXPIRES 31/12/25

Breathing new life into clutch shock absorbers or cush drives

This month, we are ‘taking up the slack’... in the transmission department

Words and photography by Steve Cooper



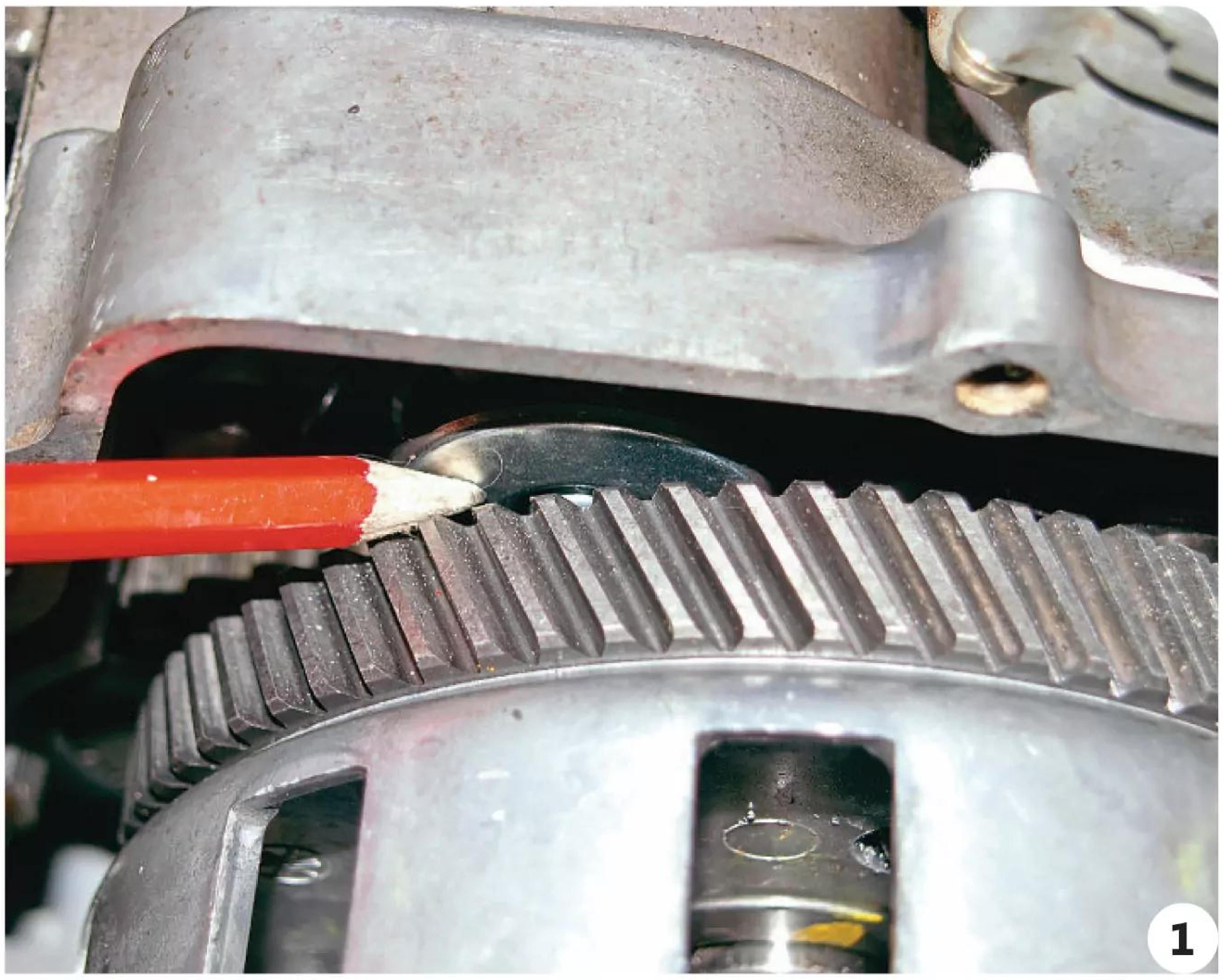
MOST JAPANESE MOTORCYCLES feature a cush drive somewhere in their transmission. It's to prevent the sudden snatch the stresses of acceleration or deceleration could have on the drivetrain, breaking parts in the process. You can often expect to find them in the rear hub, but there's regularly one within the clutch basket as well. I suspect similar applies to other machinery from elsewhere, but personally I've never strayed too far from the pathway of Oriental light.

Clutch-based shock absorbers are usually either rubber cushions or springs. These momentarily compress when drive is interrupted and re-engaged via a gear change, a momentary loss of traction or, in extremis, mad stuff such as wheelies, jumps and so on. Like all the best ideas, Japanese clutch shock absorbers are intrinsically simple yet amazingly effective and well-engineered. Here, I'm looking at the rubber containing versions, but the sprung variety can be similarly fettled with a little ingenuity.

Where it all tends to go a little sideways is when these machines outlive their manufacturer's 'shelf life.' Decades of sitting in oil allied to countless heat cycles eventually cooks the rubbers used in many of the clutch baskets. Fortunately, there are kits out there sold by enterprising firms for some of the more popular classics, but if your bike isn't on their lists, options are limited. Ridden with a saggy, hardened or broken set of rubbers, chains and sprockets take more of a hammering, and lord above knows what the long-term impacts (sic) are on the gearbox. It also feels horrible!

The harshness may be felt by those who have experienced this before, but you possibly won't know if these shock-absorbing mechanisms are knackered until you carry out an engine strip or go to change clutch plates; there's generally a very slow decline that you're unlikely to pick up. However, when you find slack between the clutch basket and the gear it's attached to, it's time to look a little deeper.

Our opening shot shows the degrees of deflection from the 'at rest point' it was possible achieve simply by turning the two components against each other by hand. Given that such movement is normally only fostered by some serious torque, we will be getting our hands dirty again, then!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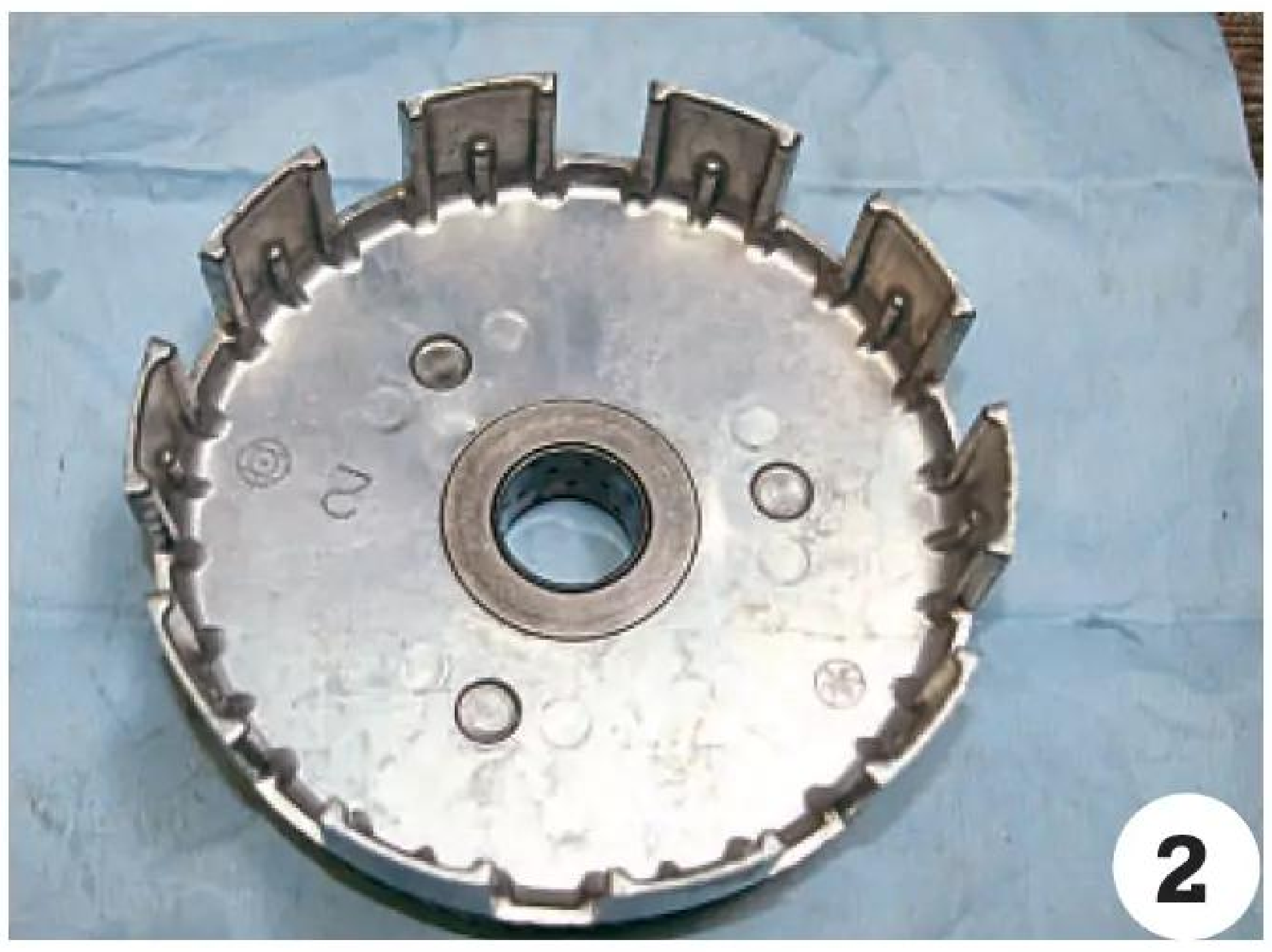
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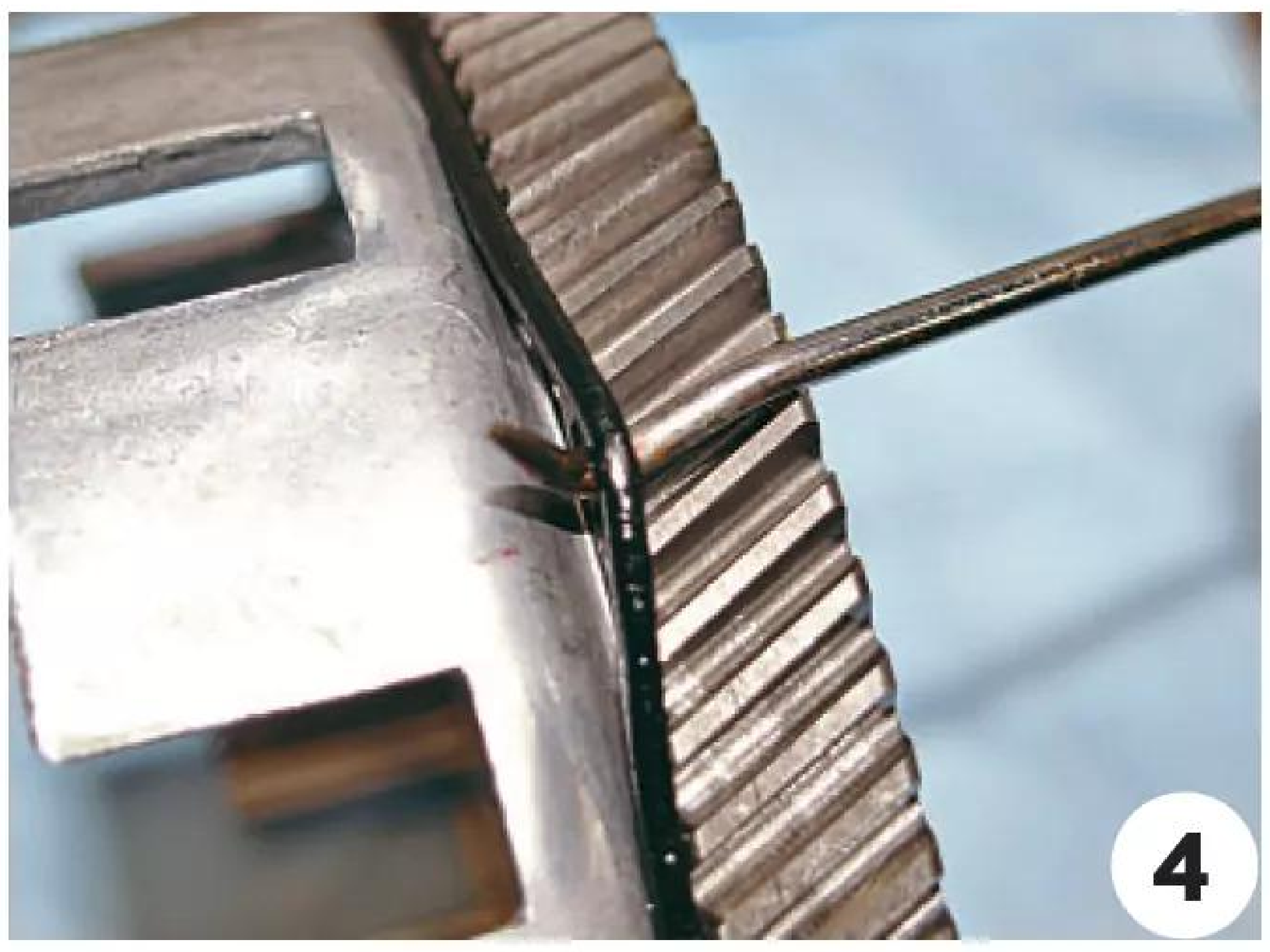
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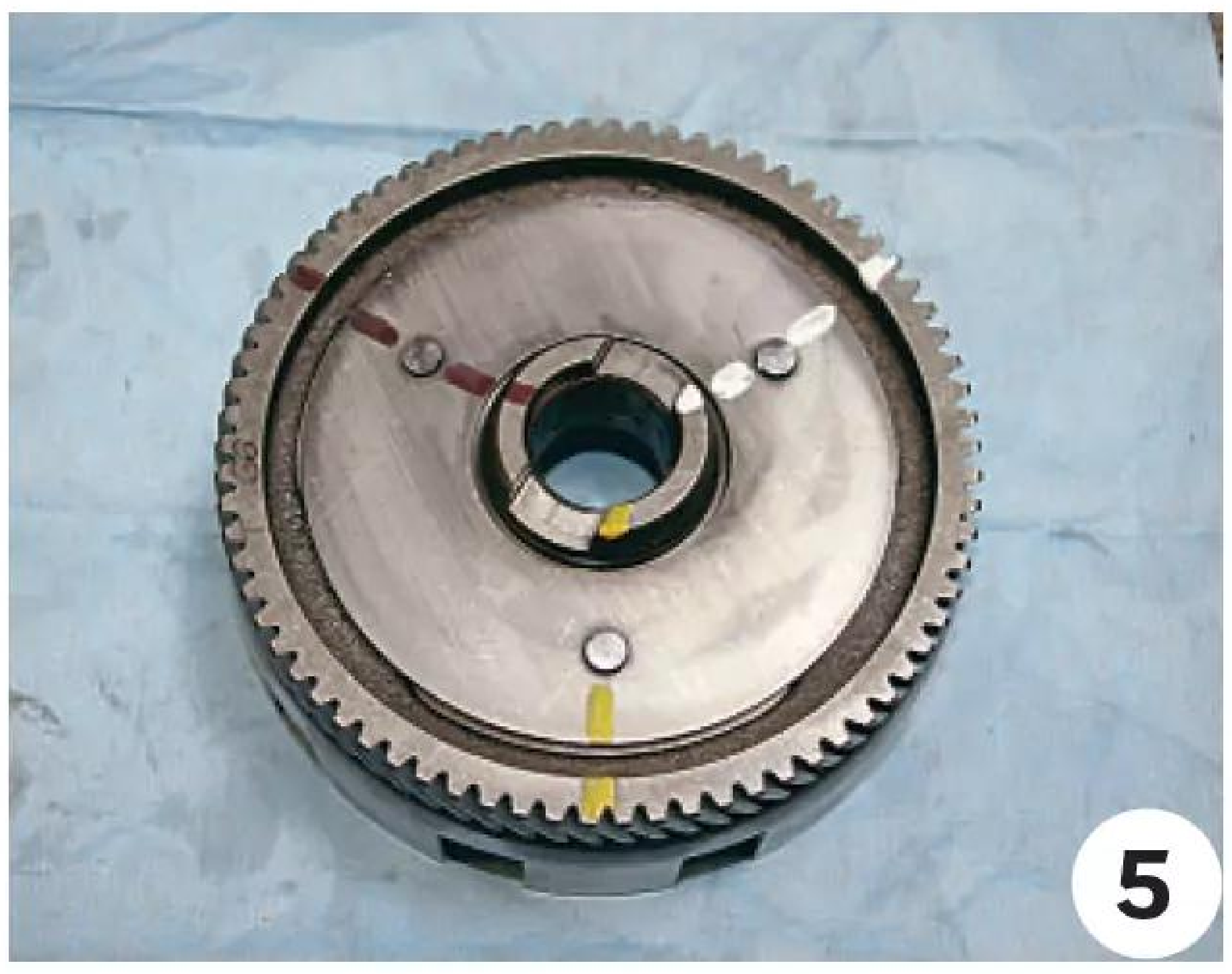
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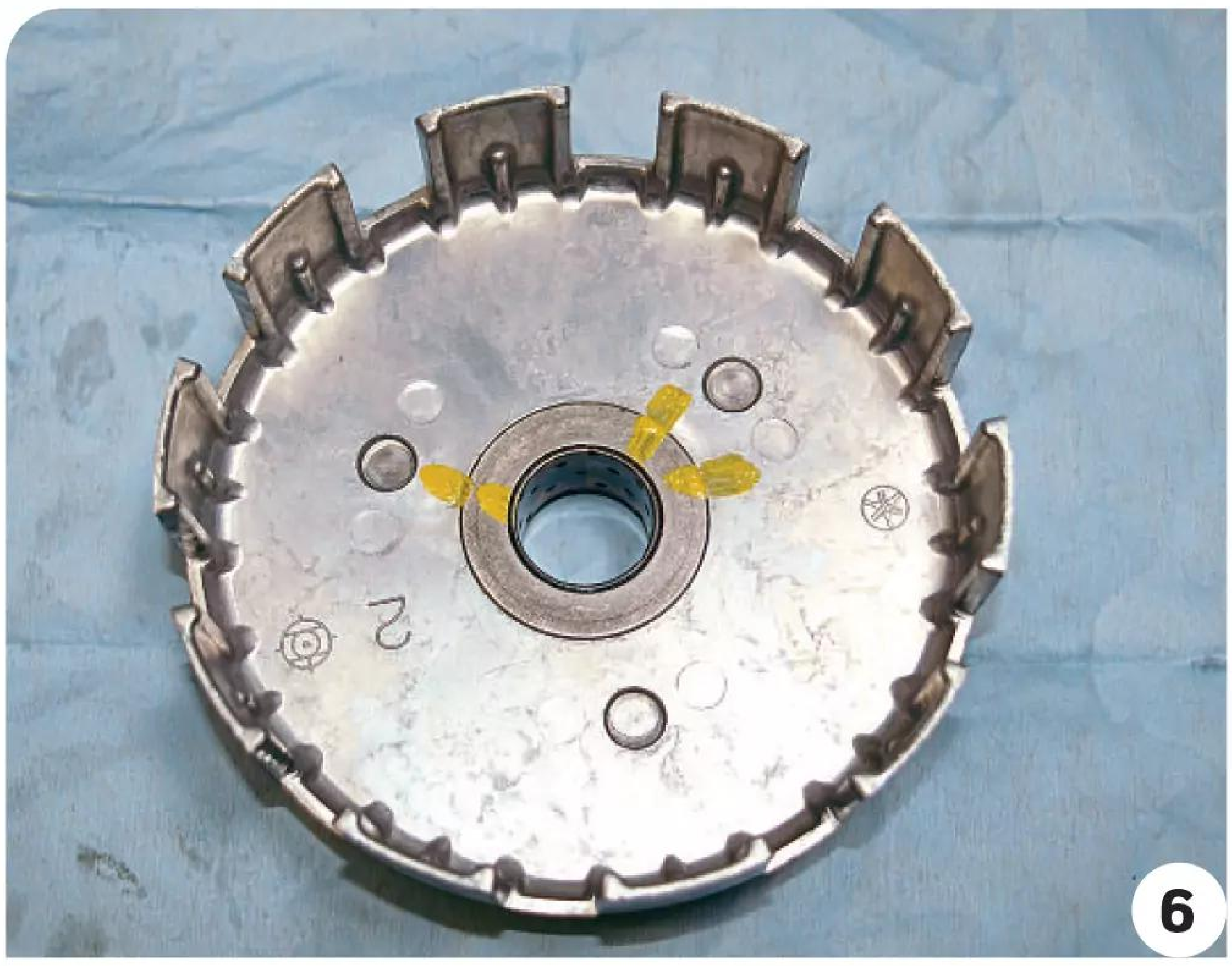
Picture 1
Before removing the clutch assembly from the gearbox input shaft, measure this critical gap. All will become apparent shortly, but you need to know how much clearance you have behind the gear. Check around a full 360 before drawing any conclusions.

Pictures 2 & 3
Viewed from either side, it's obvious the manufacturer never intended the contents of the assembly to be service items – but here comes the cunning plan.

Picture 4
Some clutch baskets like this Yamaha one have a large O ring sitting on the interface of the gear and basket. It apparently dampens out resonations so it's worth carefully removing before we get 'on the tools.'

Picture 5
In the absence of any contra-indications, assume everything must go back in precisely the same places. I'm a fan of paint pens as they leave more residue than markers.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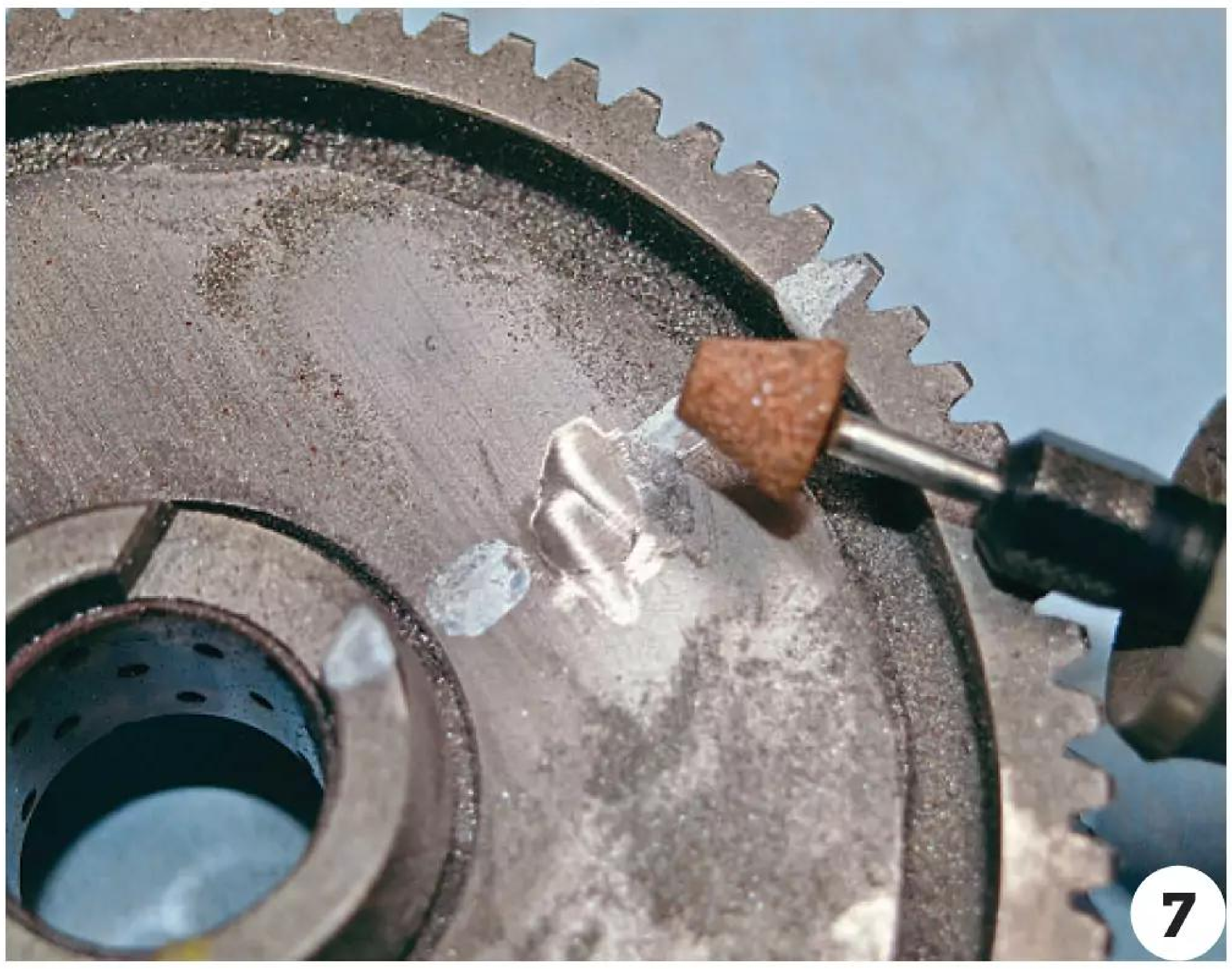
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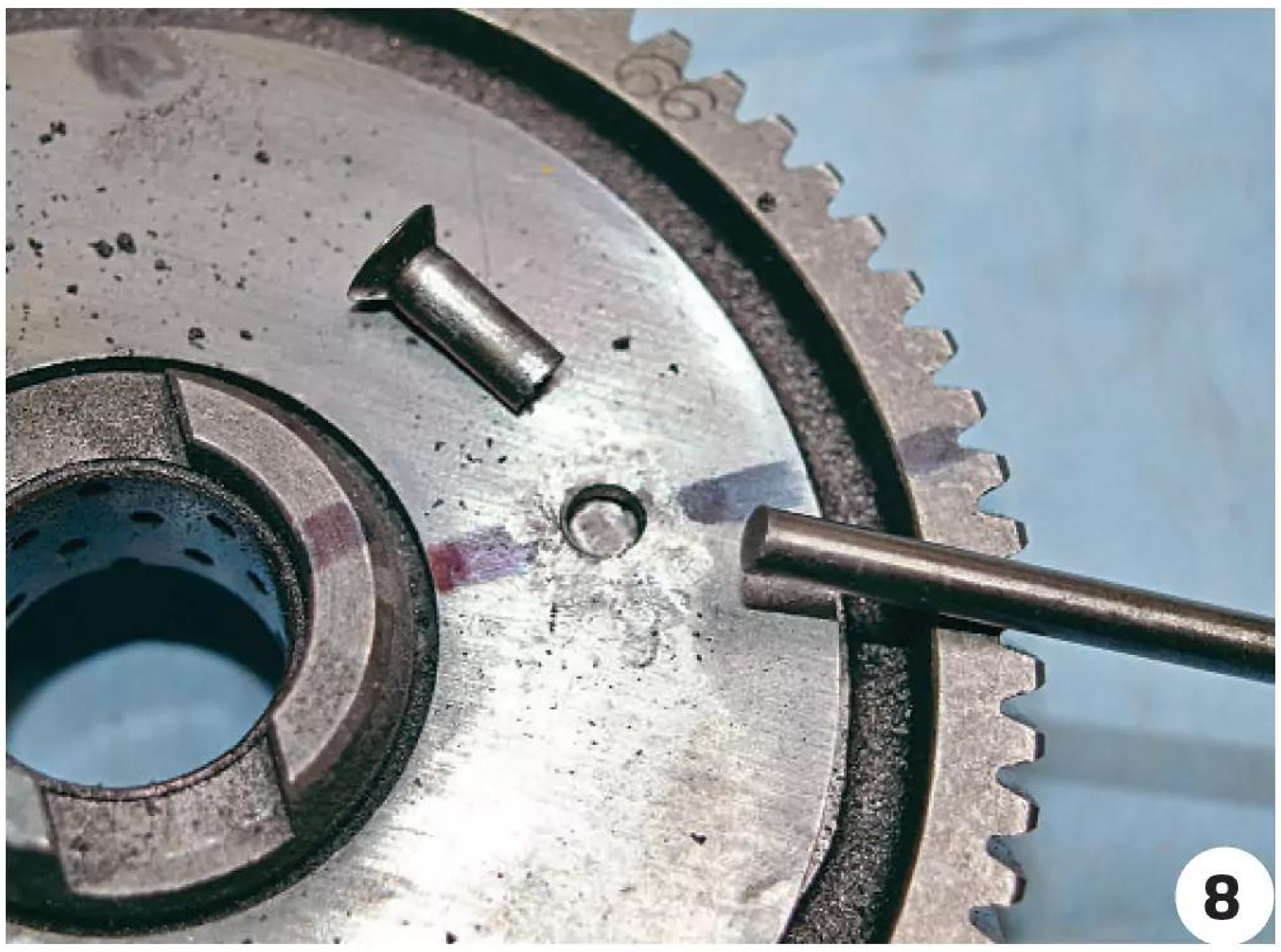
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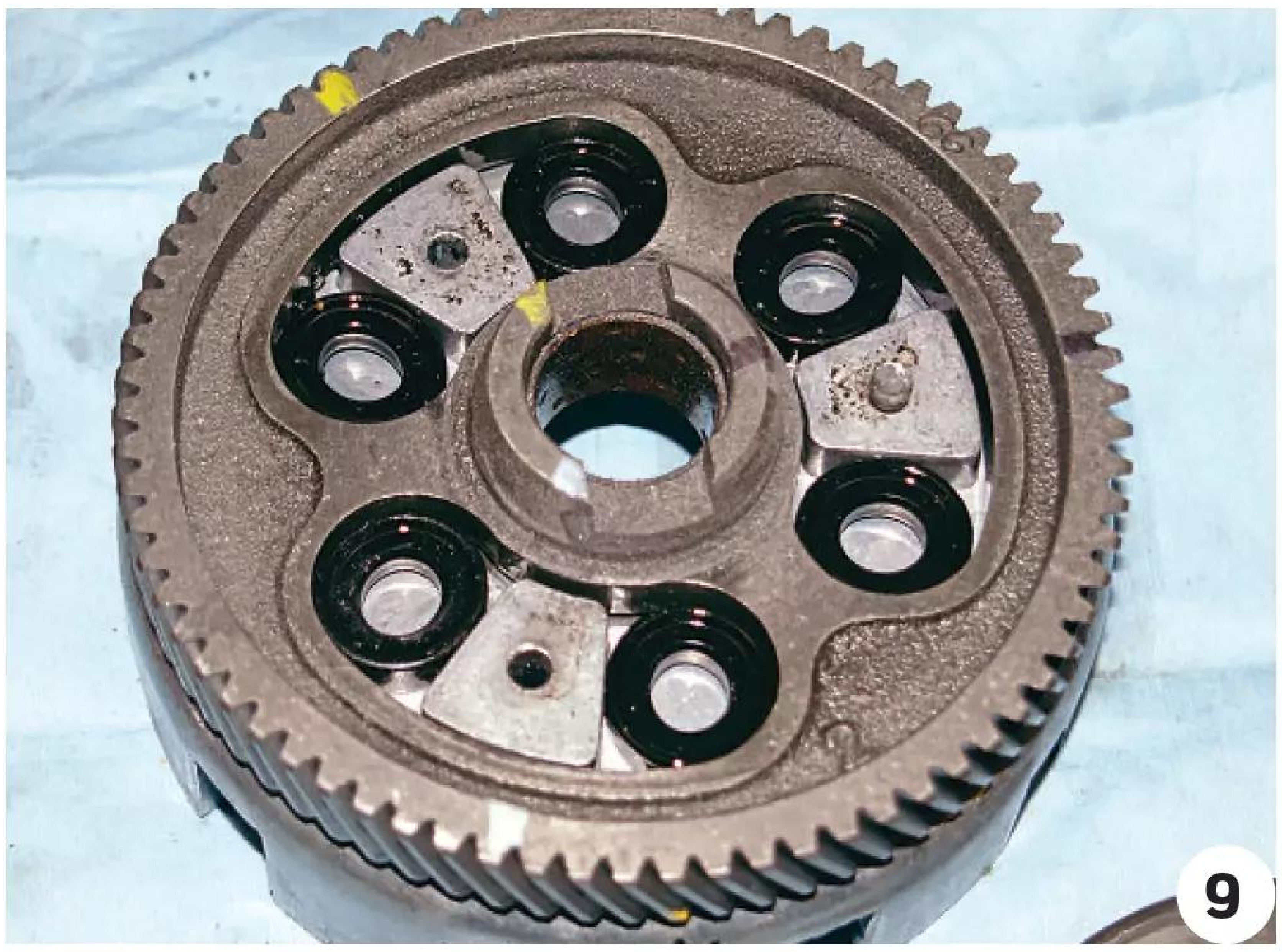
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Picture 6
And because I'm an addled brained oldster, I mark the inside face of the clutch basket as well!

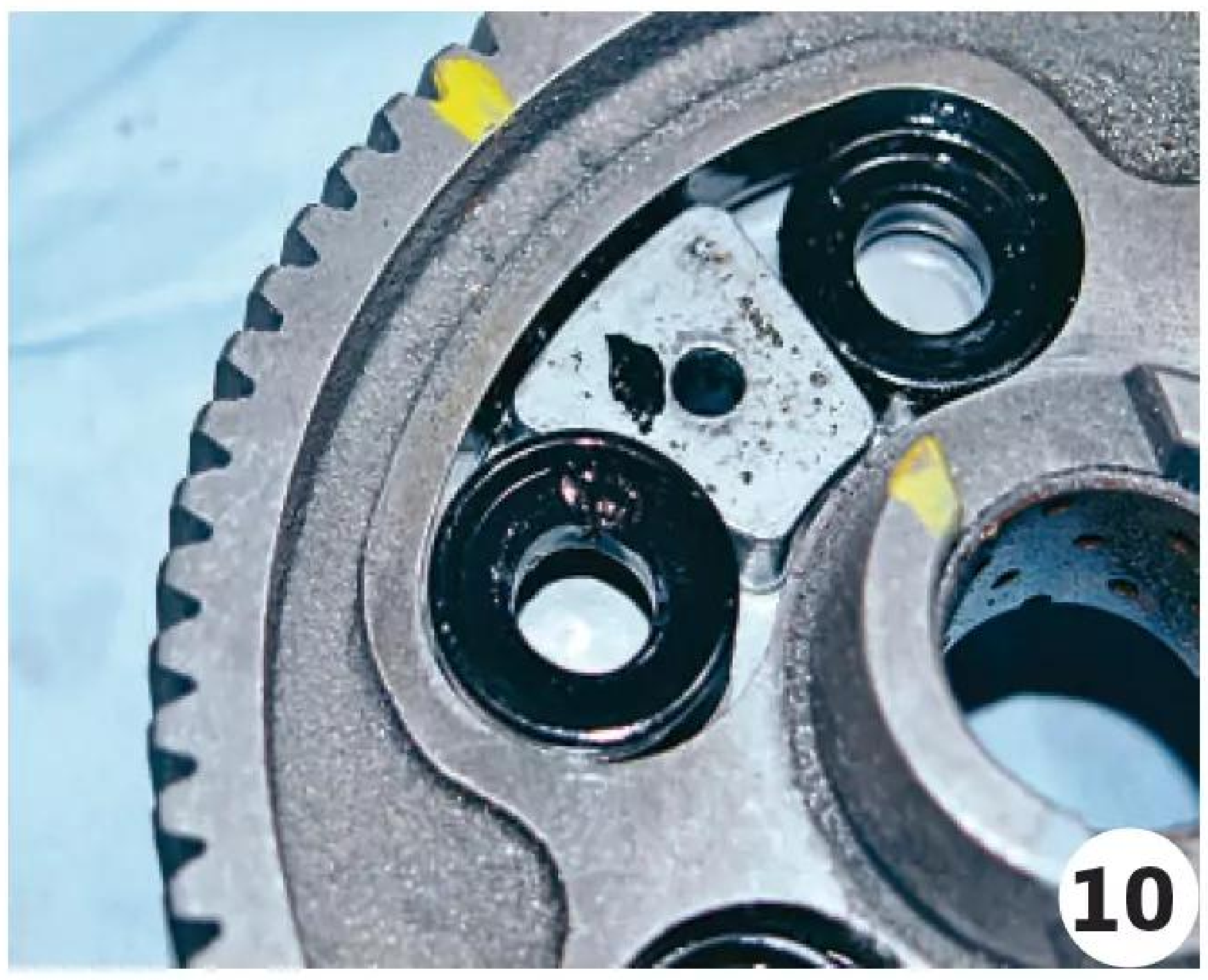
Picture 7
The gear and basket are fixed together with rivets that will defy all normal twist drills and even some special ones. Grinding the peened-over end off with a Dremel and suitable abrasive wheel is the way forward here.

Picture 8
Having ground all the rivets, some localised heat is applied, followed by a strong 'talking to' with a pin punch and hammer. It is imperative that the alloy basket is properly supported underneath, or you'll be looking for a replacement!

Pictures 9 & 10
With the basket and gear separated, the cush drive rubbers can be removed and inspected. These were variously undersize, rock hard and/or falling apart.

> ***"Clutch-based shock absorbers are usually either rubber cushions or springs. These momentarily compress when drive is interrupted and re-engaged via a gear change, a momentary loss of traction or, in extremis, mad stuff such as wheelies..."***

Picture 11
You could make new rivets, but as I have neither a lathe nor a press, I went for high-tensile, low-profile, flanged cap head screws. This is where the clearance measurement in **Picture 1** comes in – the heads need to clear everything as they stick out slightly into the primary drive area.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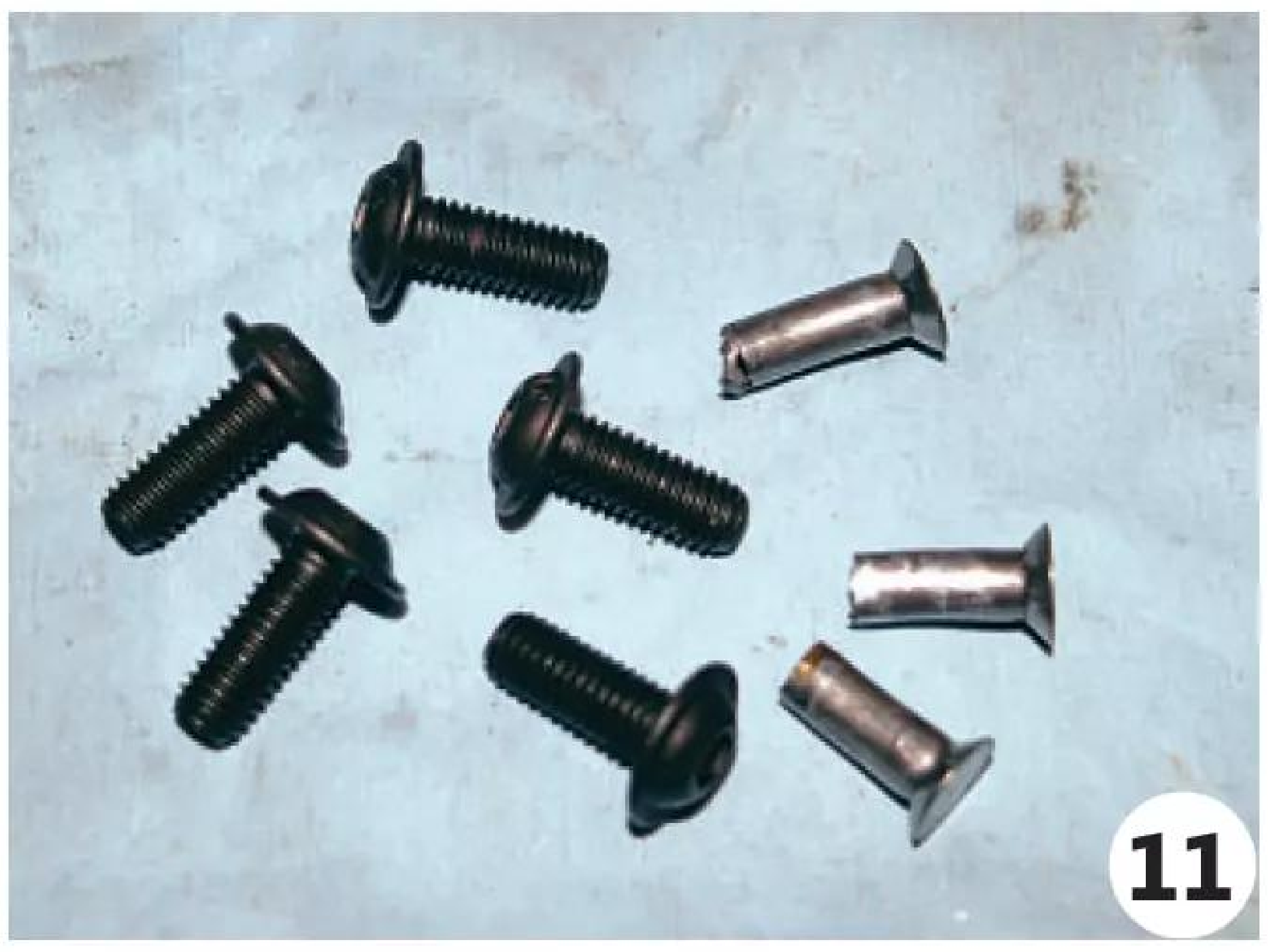
Picture 12
With a suitable tap, the alloy clutch basket is threaded to accept the screws for reassembly.

Picture 13
Previously, I've managed to find some small oil-proof rubber doughnuts I cut to size to replace the originals, but not on this occasion. This is oil/acid/caustic/solvent resistant neoprene drive belt and cheap as chips online.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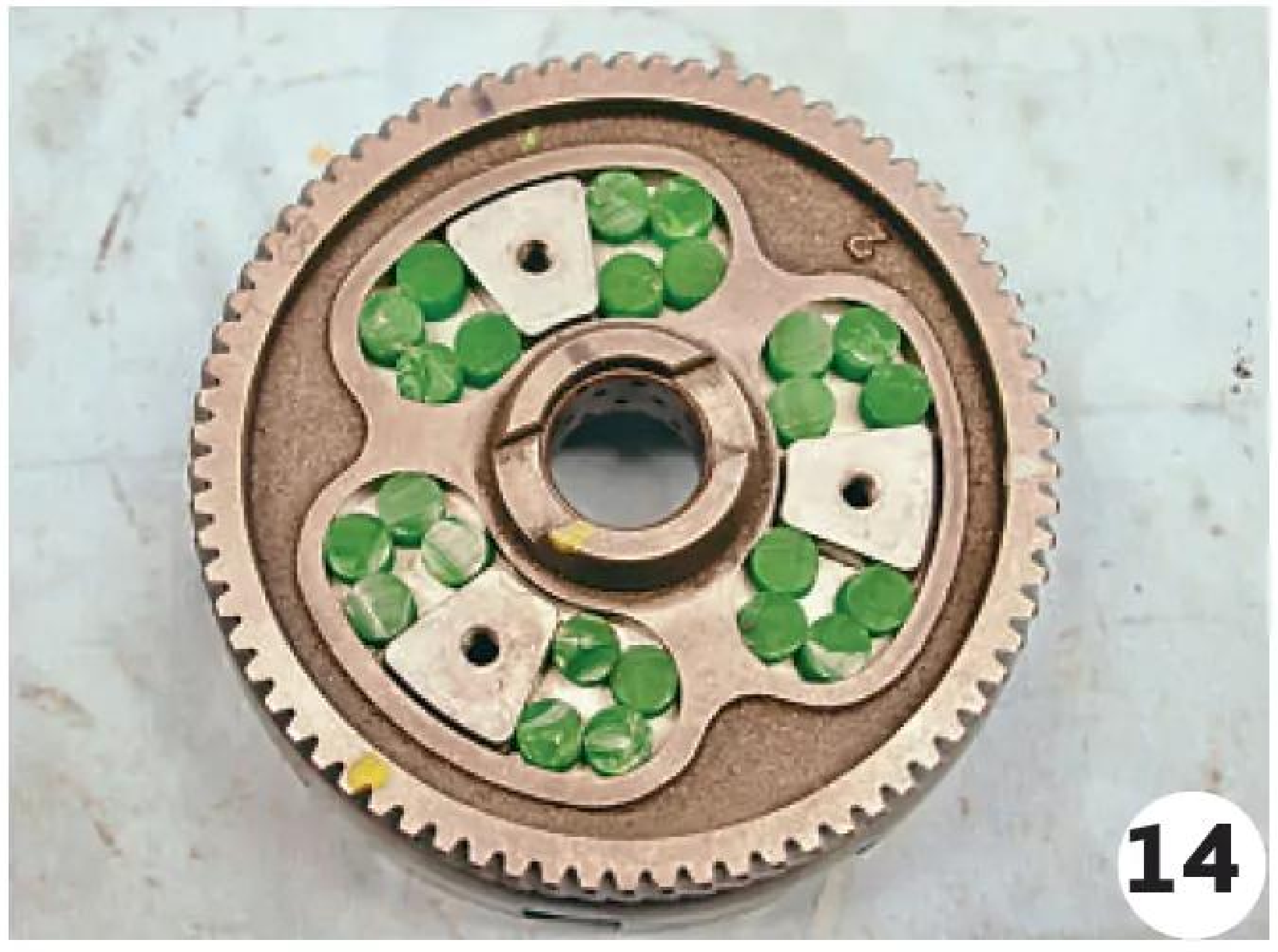
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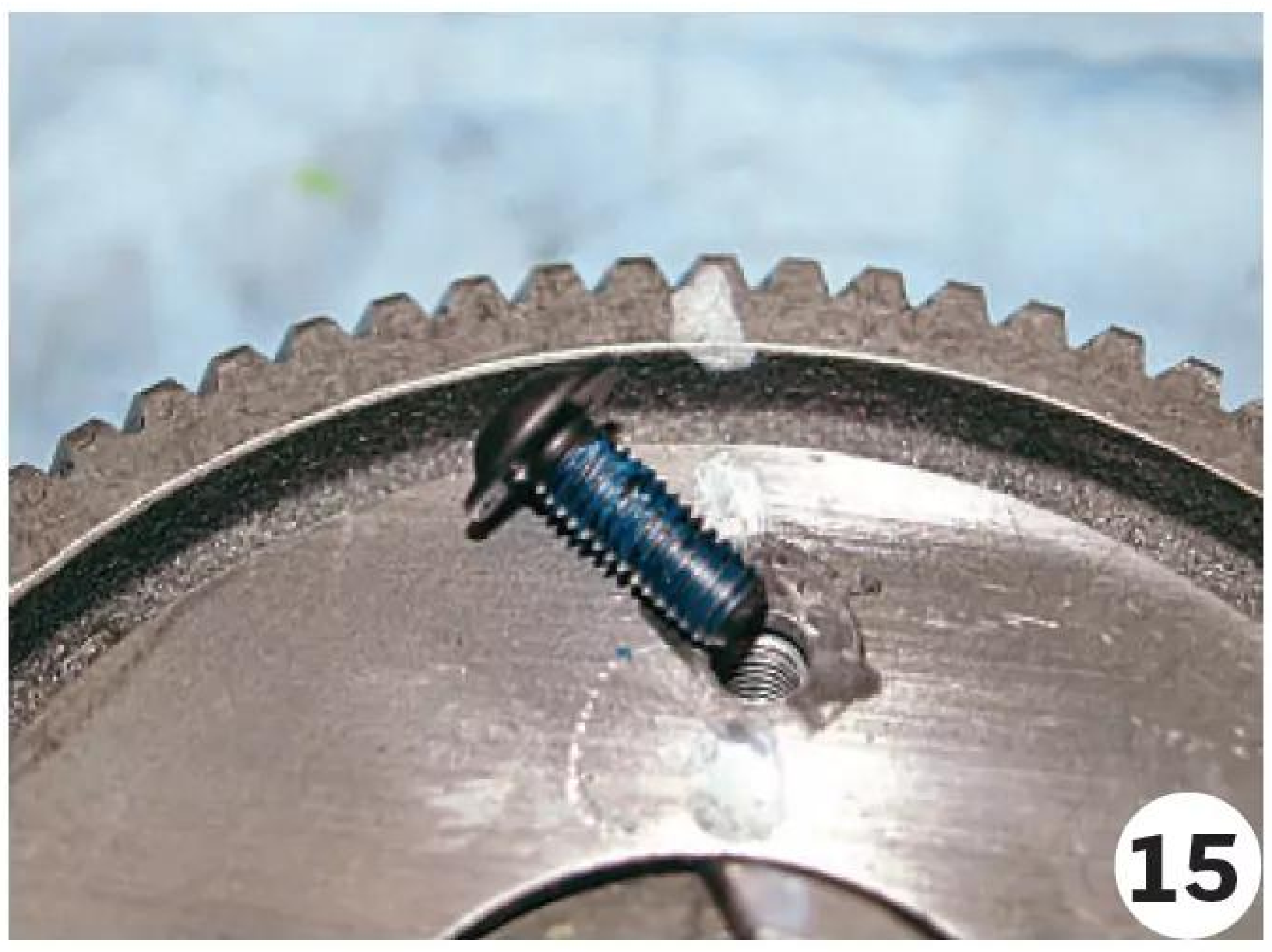
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Picture 14
Cut to size, the registers are filled with short lengths of neoprene drive belt. I did a dry run as per the image but found there was still too much movement so bought some thinner diameter material to fill the gaps – but forgot to take pictures, sorry!

Picture 15
With the new absorbers duly packed in, the two parts were reunited as per the location markings and the cap head screws fitted. Note the use of wipe-on thread locker, which ensures that the fittings stay put.

Picture 16
Final check is to ensure the screw's heads are below the face of the clutch basket; if they are raised, carefully trim down with the Dremel and suitable abrasive wheel.

With the rebuilt unit placed back on the input shaft, the clutch was given the once over and parts replaced as necessary (another In The Workshop feature!) and the bike recommissioned. Just over 1000 miles on, I'm happy to report the DIY clutch shock absorber overhaul has worked fine with absolutely no issues. The Tiny Terror, aka Yamaha YL1, still performs just as the guys at Iwata intended, but I seriously doubt anyone involved in its construction would have expected it to still be running 58 years after it was sold! CBG

YAMAHA
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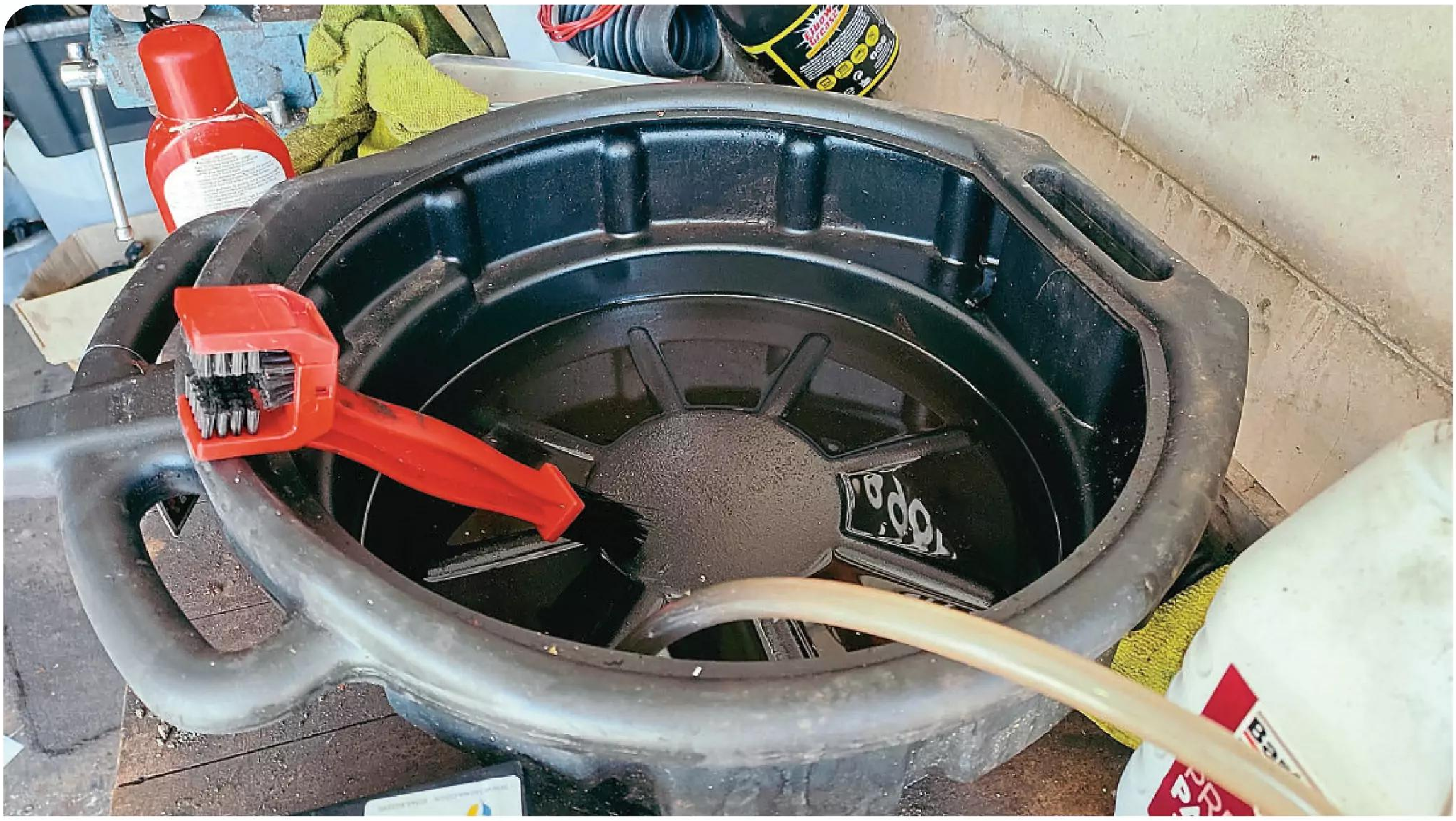
Shock and awe

You'll also find shock absorbers, or cush drives, in the rear hubs of many motorcycles including the Yamaha YL1 here in camera. They are there to ensure the pick-up when opening the throttle is as smooth as possible. Almost without exception, these are synthetic rubber components inserted as either separate individual segments or a series of segments connected via a common moulding. These then accommodate 'wings' in the rear sprocket carrier. Quite simply, the rubbers compress as the throttle is wound open, then go back to their original shape (or almost) as a steady speed is reached. Apply the back brake and the rear hub shock absorber compresses in the opposite direction.

Now factor in just how many times that process happens over a bike's life - is it any wonder the rubber eventually degrades? If you're fortunate, you'll find a NOS replacement or a business that's remade them. Grab what's on offer and marvel at just how smooth your old classic is to ride. It's one of the most remarkable upgrades you can do for relatively little effort – you are genuinely very likely to be hugely impressed by the transformation.

And if you can't locate a replacement? Apparently slices of old inner tube cut to size and carefully fitted can afford a viable running repair.



The washer ready for use

Things what we've been up to…

Oli has been hoovering up all those small jobs like a man possessed!

"HAVE YOU BEEN DOING anything in the garage?" said Matt the ed, and of course I have, but mostly small jobs.

For example, in my unpowered lock-up I have long wanted a means to clean off grubby motorcycle parts, and so I created a cordless parts washer from mostly scrap. I took an oil drain tray, a spare 12v battery I had lying around and a 12v oil drain pump I purchased a decade ago to do an oil change on a Ford Transit. This device requires you to shove one pipe down a dipstick hole and the other into a suitable receptacle.

I stuck one pipe into a gallon of paraffin – I use paraffin for parts washing because I have never found anything better or cheaper. I connected

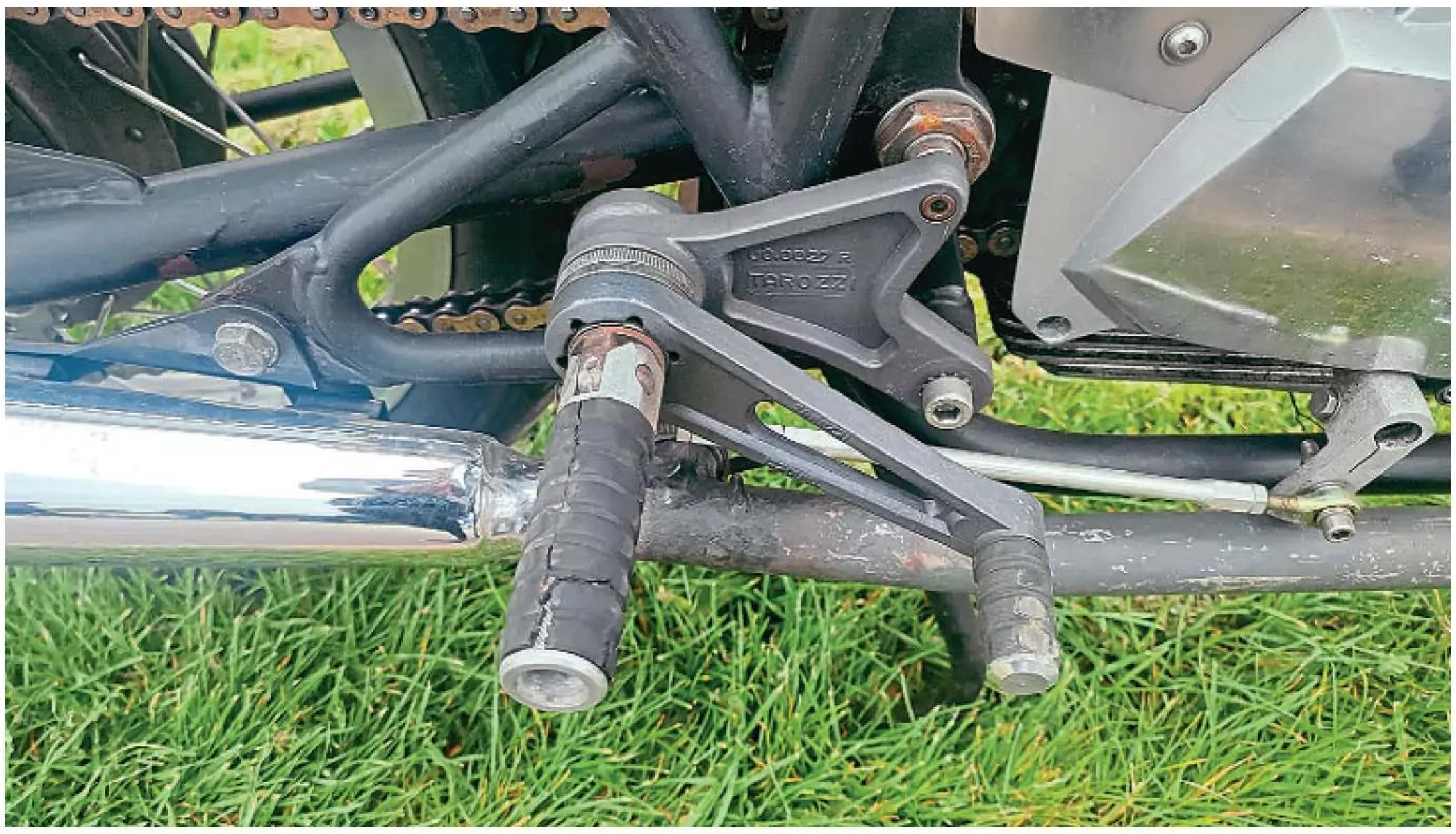
Not Honda's finest moment

I have had reports it can take up so six treatments to get the jets all cleaned out

> ***"Necessity is, after all, the mother of invention..."***

Bargain of the year

Not bargain of the year



Anyone got one of these mounting plates? Please?

the pump to the battery, turned it on, and it sucked the fluid from the can and provided a spray of it at the other end. Once there was enough in the tray, I could stick the pipe into the fluid and recirculate it and, when the job was done, pump it back into the can. Necessity is, after all, the mother of invention.

I went to help my friend Jon try to get his Honda CJ250T going on two cylinders, rather than one. It took some time, but we finally diagnosed that one of the carburettors had become bunged up, so they were removed and brought home for an ultrasonic spa treatment, returned, refitted, and it still didn't fire on two cylinders. We did some more guess work and wondered if it was the spark failing on one cylinder, but it seemed to be sparking at the plug.

All was reassembled and it still only ran on one until I sprayed carb cleaner into the inlet when it spluttered into life – until the spray was exhausted. There is, clearly, something up with no. 1 carb, so that's come off for another bath.

My own Moto Guzzi V7 has been fitted with new silencers, which I picked up at an autojumble for £20 the pair. The stainless items were originally designed to be fitted to a modern Triumph and so had the inlets at 20-degree angles rather than straight. They would not fit the 'Guzzi until another chum, the genius that is Dr Foster, sliced the ends off and filleted them with an angle grinder, doing it freehand like the artist he is.

He then TIG-welded them back on straight and I took them home and bolted them in place, using a pair of mounting brackets from some Ducati Monster silencers I had lying about, having bought them some time ago to fit to a bike they didn't. Fit, that is. The new silencers sound fantastic, no louder than the stock ones but with a lovely low-down grunt.

And I spent a merry afternoon trying to put together a set of Tarozzi rear sets for my Morini that I bought online. I should have looked much harder at the pictures, and to be fair to the seller, they did say they were an incomplete mixture of good, new and broken parts, rather than a complete set, but it was (ahem) late in the day, they were cheap, and I had an itchy trigger finger. It turned out, after some lengthy attempts to put them together, that they came with two left-hand mounting plates and no right-hand one. So, into the box of ill-considered purchases for the next jumble they go. Unless some kind soul has a right-hand one lurking in a box somewhere to exchange for folding money. **CBG**

Fettlin' for sale

The BSA B31 has found its perfect new owner, but the list of little niggles **Matt** wants to sort before delivery grows when he starts looking...

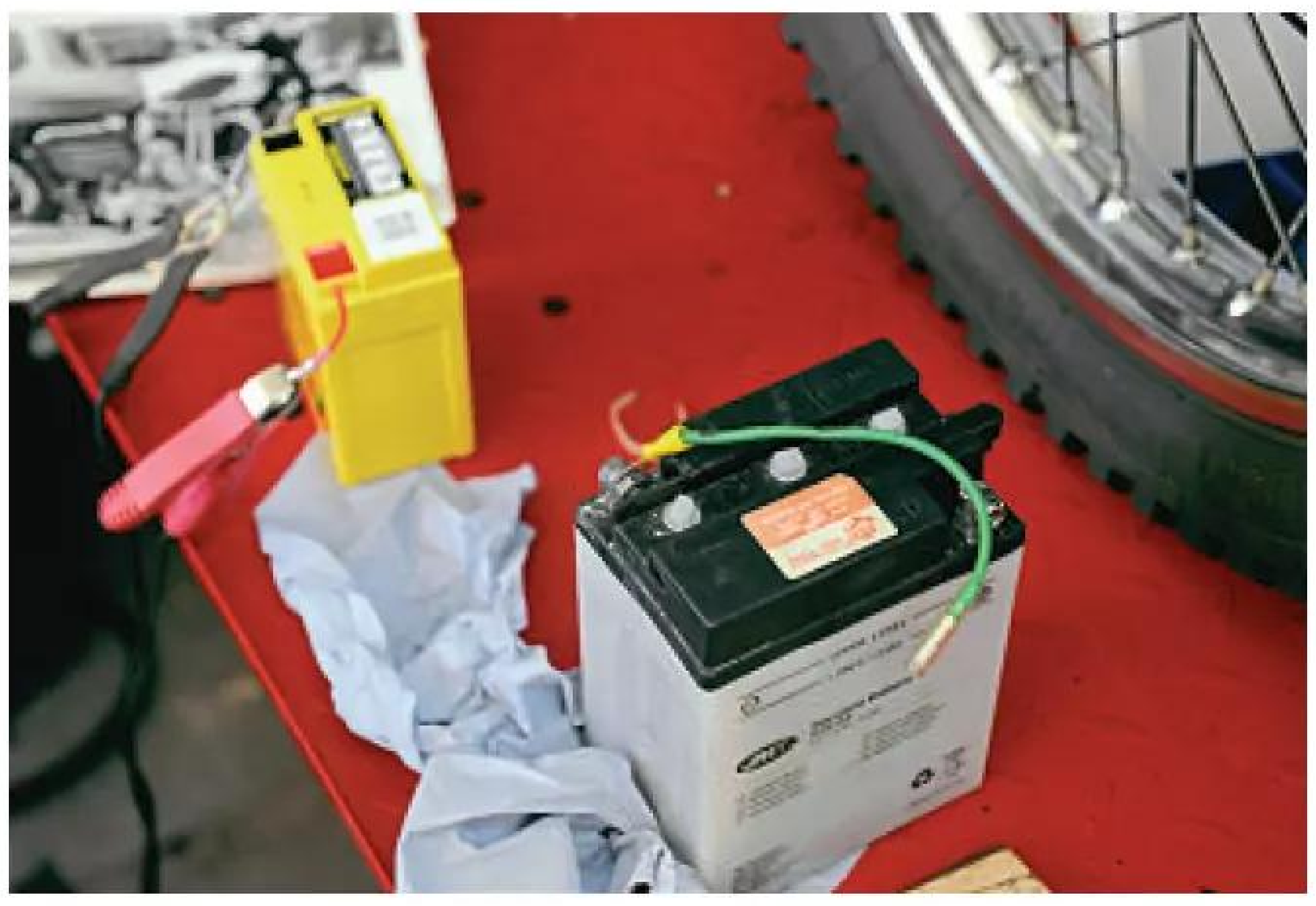
To become more in touch with this new world of old bikes, when I became editor more than eight years ago I bought this 1954 BSA B31. There's no better way than to immerse yourself into something head-first. A local bike from the famous Hornigolds bike shop in Dereham, Norfolk, the Beeza wasn't standard. Nor were the engine numbers matching to the frame –oh no! – it's a B31, not a Brough. I didn't care because it had everything I wanted – a single-cylinder engine, manual ignition, magneto, non-swinging arm suspension, a saddle and 19in wheels. And to me, it looked a million dollars.

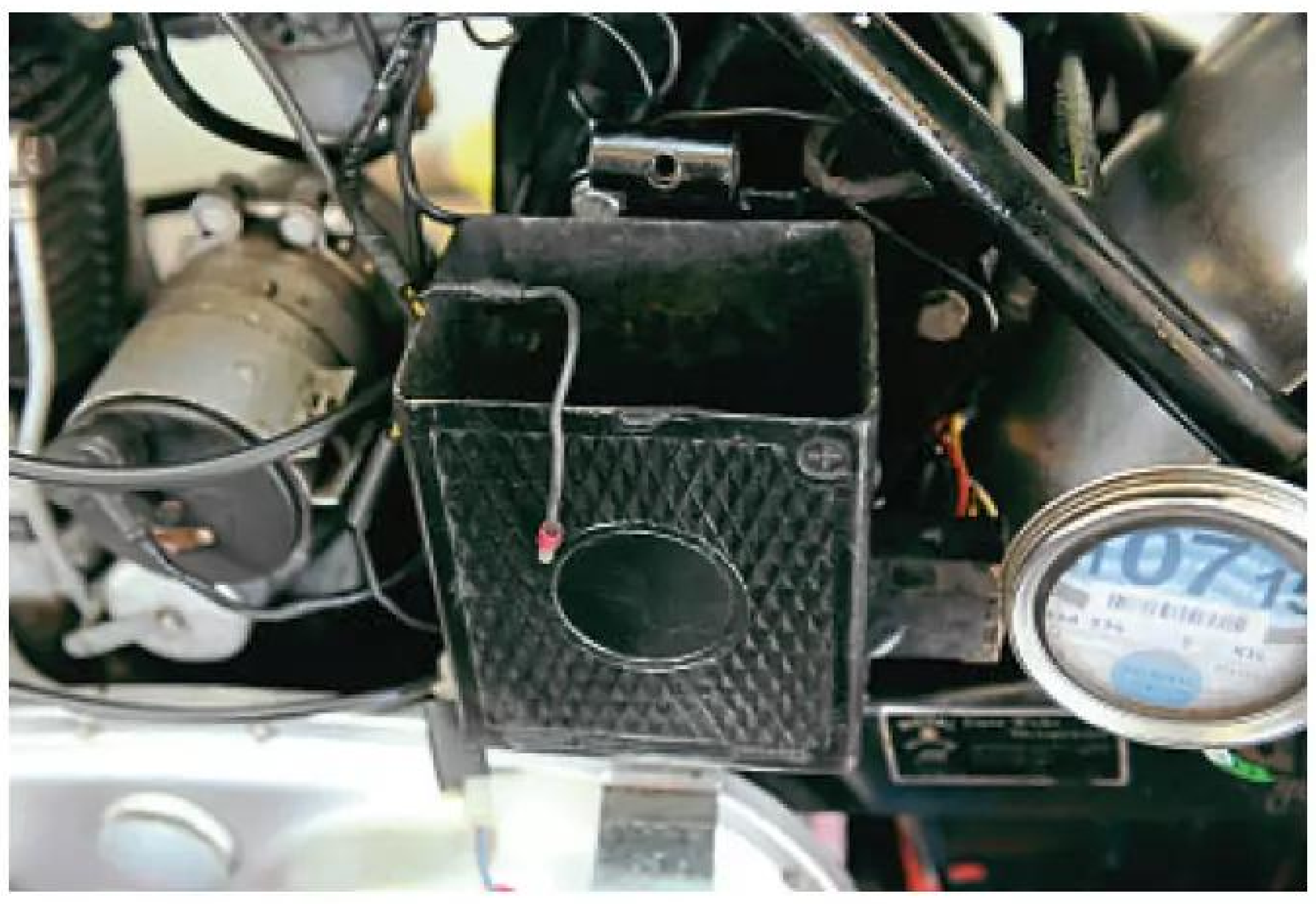
Today, eight years and one month after buying the BSA, I've delivered the B31 to John. The BSA has been my companion during this old bike journey, making me feel a genuine part of this amazing world and done me so well. It's covered more than 8000 miles, done trials, toured with my daughter two-up with luggage, raced at the Malle Mile, and even had a go at Motogymkhana, all with no issues, so it seemed a shame to not do those few little jobs before it moved on.

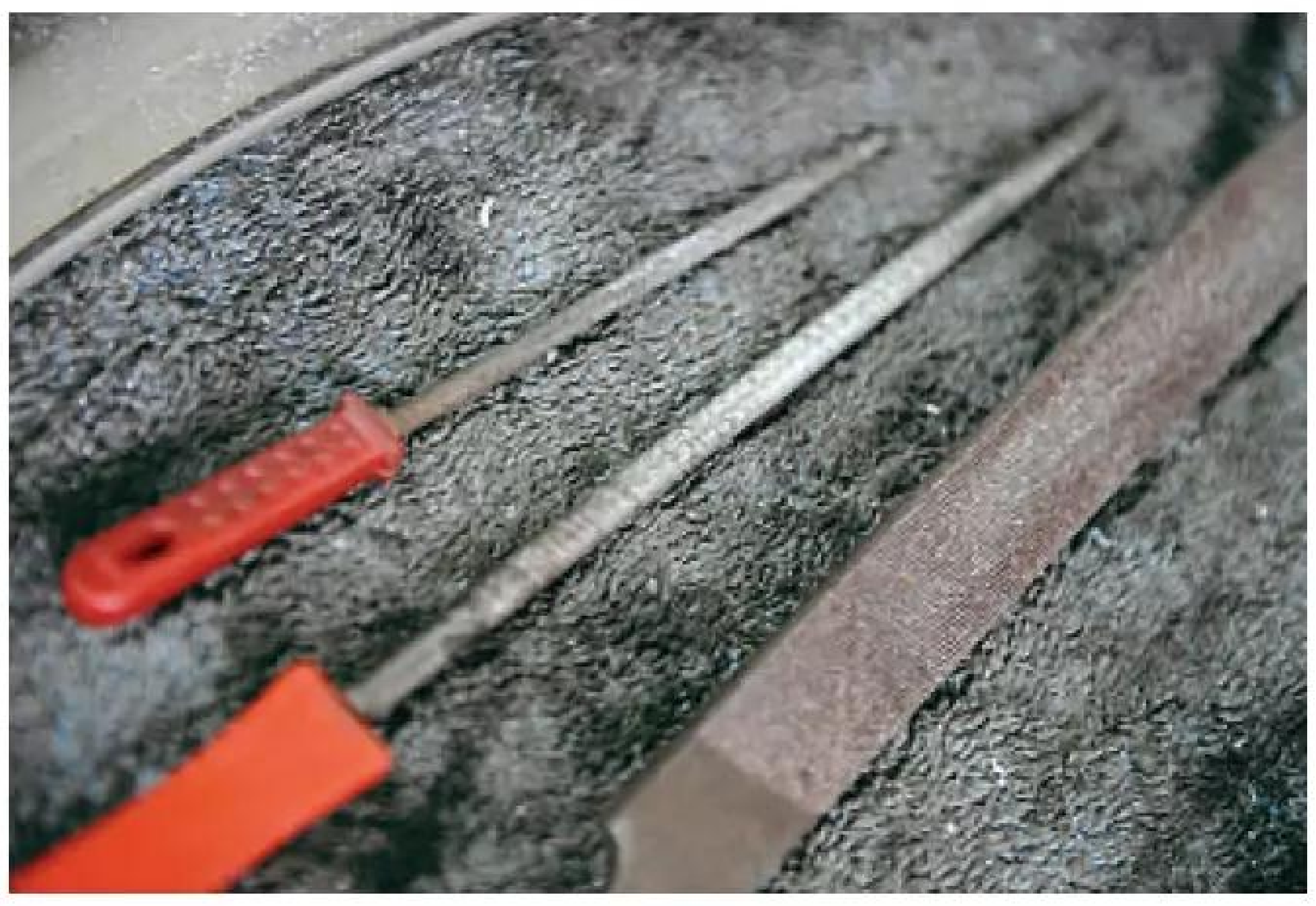
The engine was fine, tappets, oil and leaks checked. Alex Barona, of Matchless Engineering (01603 630180) had worked wonders on the only weak point, the magneto, a year ago, giving first-kick starting hot or cold. The gearbox, chain and sprockets were all looked good, and the brakes braked.

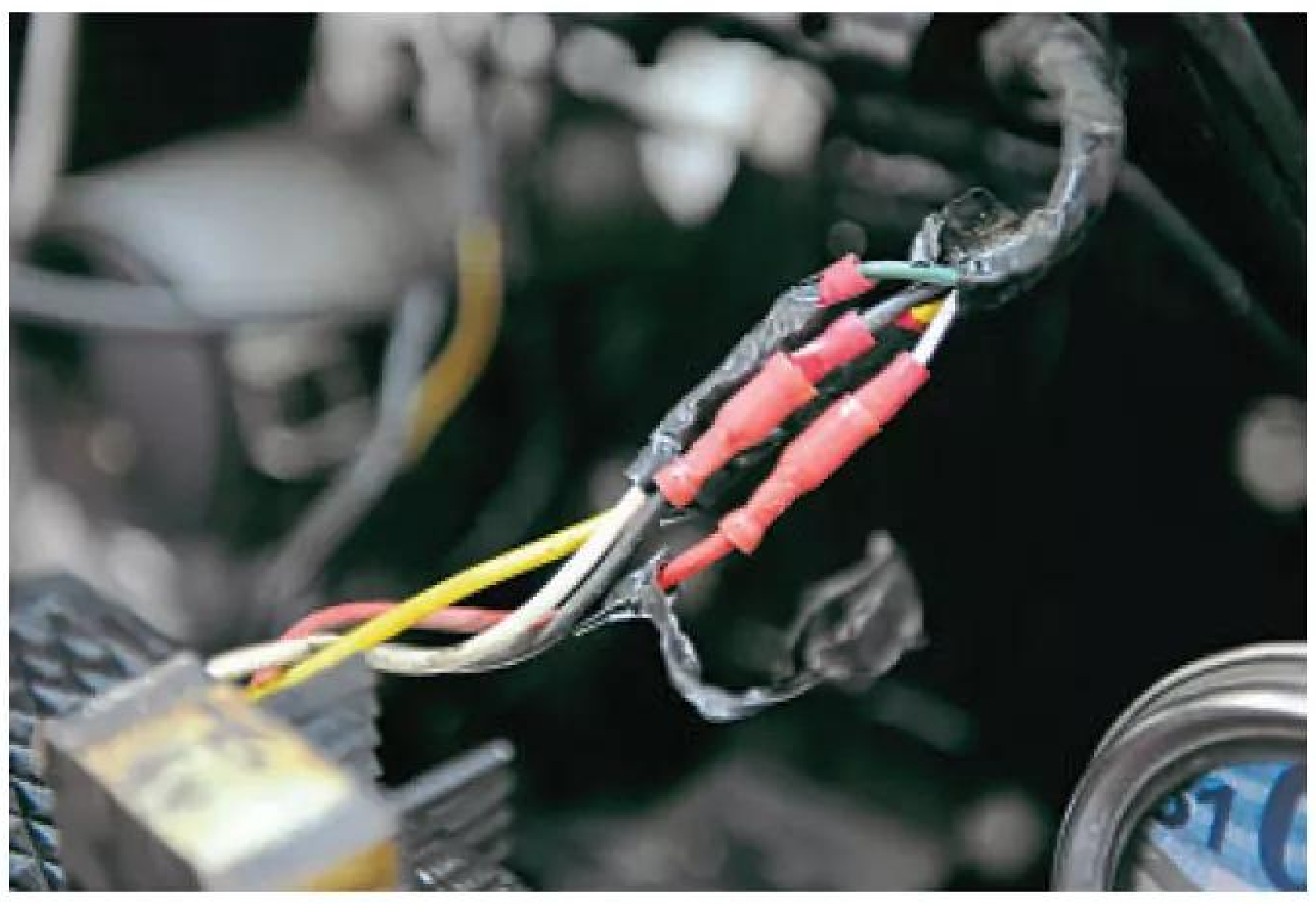
But the lights didn't work, the rear mudguard was loose, and the battery didn't fit the battery box. After trying to weld up the alloy mudguard, I gave up and bought a new one from Feked.com for about £70 and it was superb. The rear Bantam Raygun-style Wipac rear light fell apart on inspection, so a reproduction one was got for £16 and is identical to the old one, so the original lens fitted onto the new back. One new bulb and some electricery from Auto Electrical Supplies (autoelectricalsupplies.co.uk) and we had a rear light. Oiling the rear brake switch gave us a brake light, too.

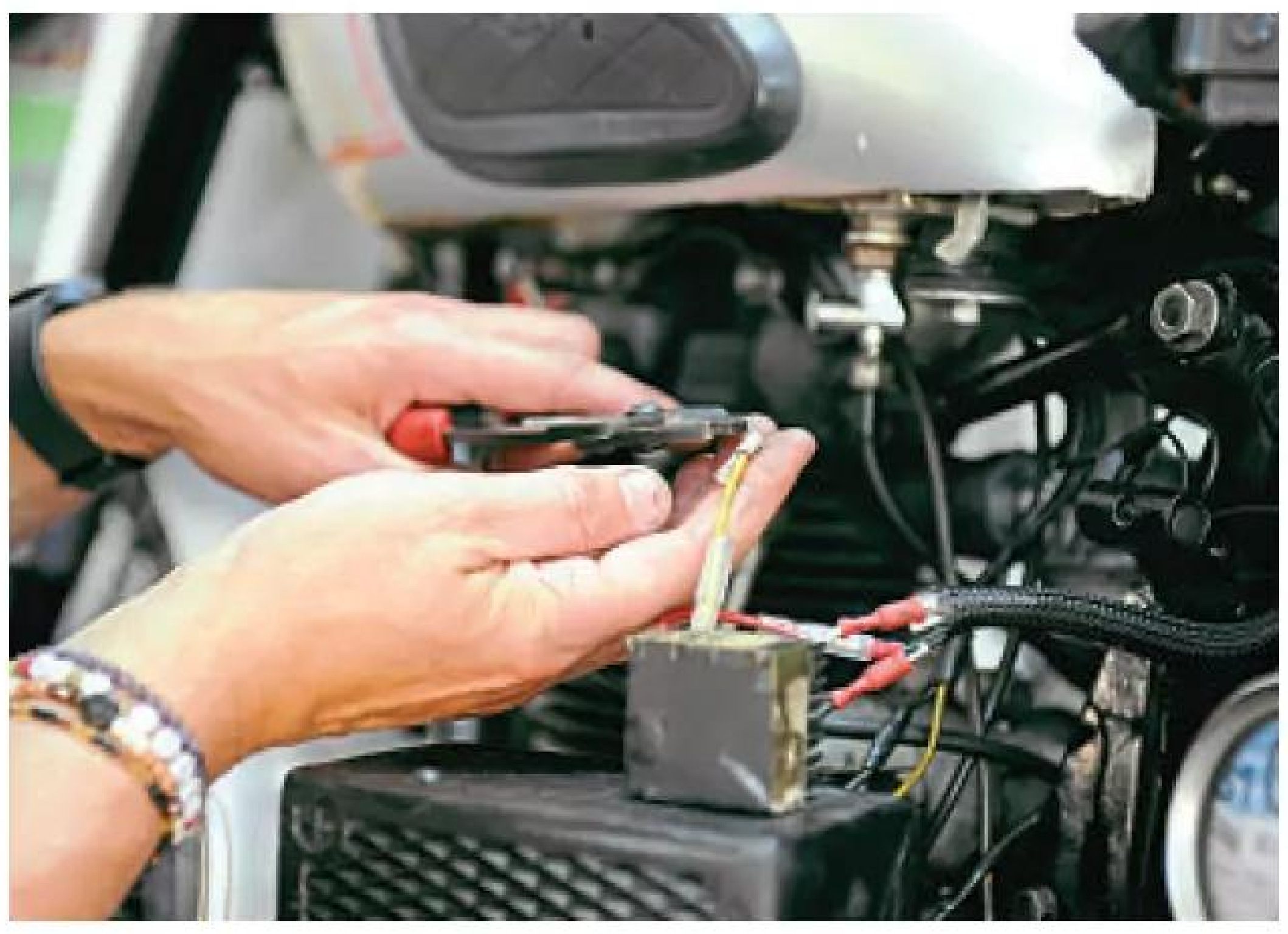
The rear light bracket needed a tiny bit of welding, then the mudguard needed drilling for the rear light and numberplate holder and cutting to clear the chain and guard. This had cracked on the old one, so I was cautious not to have any areas that would promote this in future. So, I radiused the cut-out and then folded round a small lip to hopefully help.







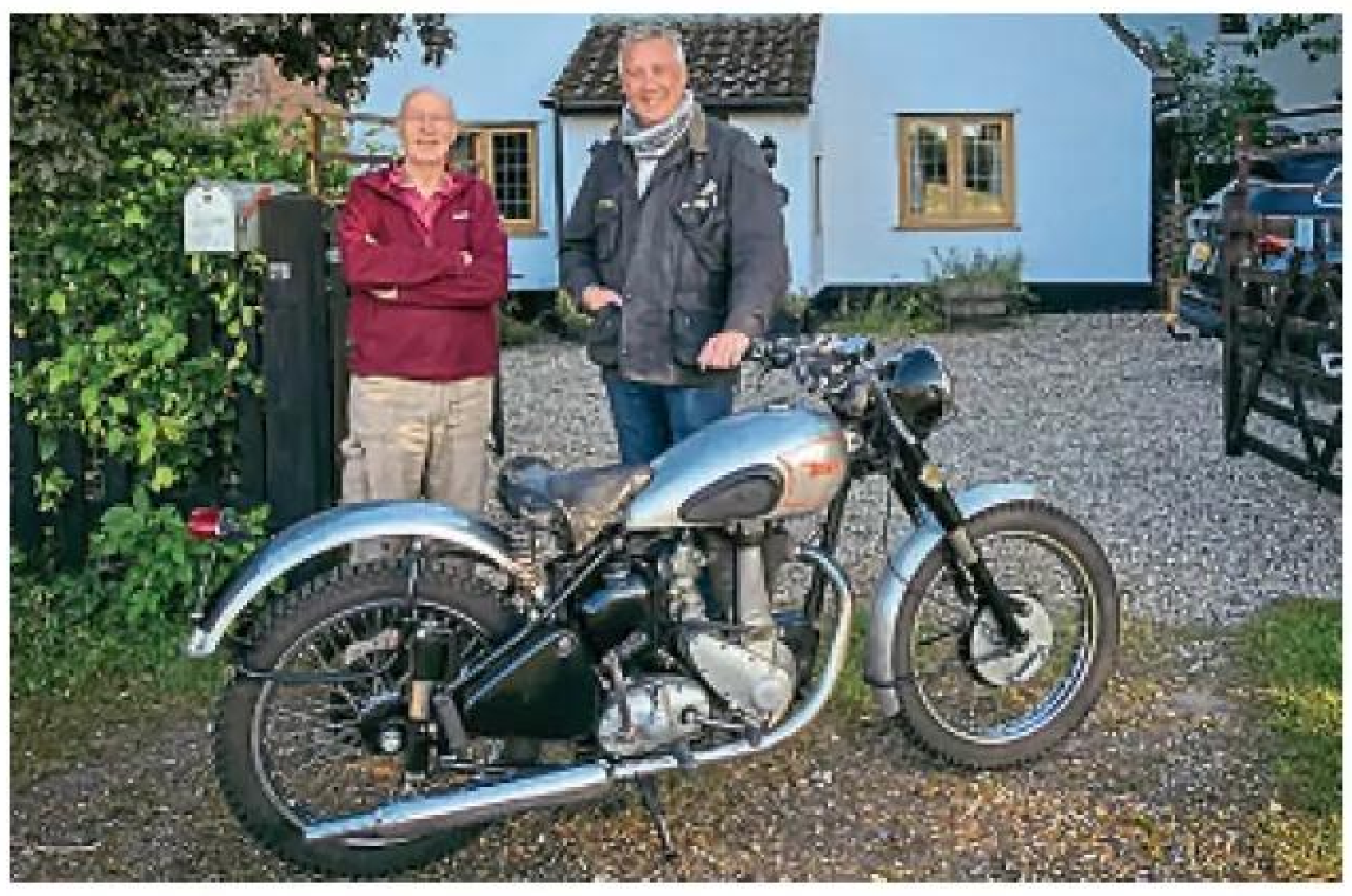




A smaller battery was the only way around the existing 6-volt unit fitting the fake Lucas box, about £24, and though there was a modern regulator in place, the colourful wires didn't look in place. So, some black braided sleeving helped to mask the regulator wires as well as the new rear light wiring, giving a more authentic look. And just as well, as the regulator wiring connections were about to fall apart and let me down!

A new bulb in the front sorted the Lord of Darkness up front, but the old Bakelite switch is on its last legs – you have to wiggle it to be illuminated. Still, I think it's the first time I'd ever had dip and main beam working!

Wheeling the bike out, it started easily after a couple of months on the bench, and in the evening light I took an extended ride over to John's. The sunshine was lovely and warming, the bike felt on song, and once there we chatted about the little foibles these old bikes have. John showed me photos of his old Comet, Commando, Honda CB and Norton single, a wonderful collection anyone would be proud of, while Maria showed us how to fill out the logbook…



I now have my ES2 to finish, and then the Commando. And John has his B31. British bikes are just great, aren't they? CBG

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CBR

Project CBR - an old friend's new lease of life

Since retirement, Matt's old race bike continues to go from dining room furniture to workshop, to standard, and back...

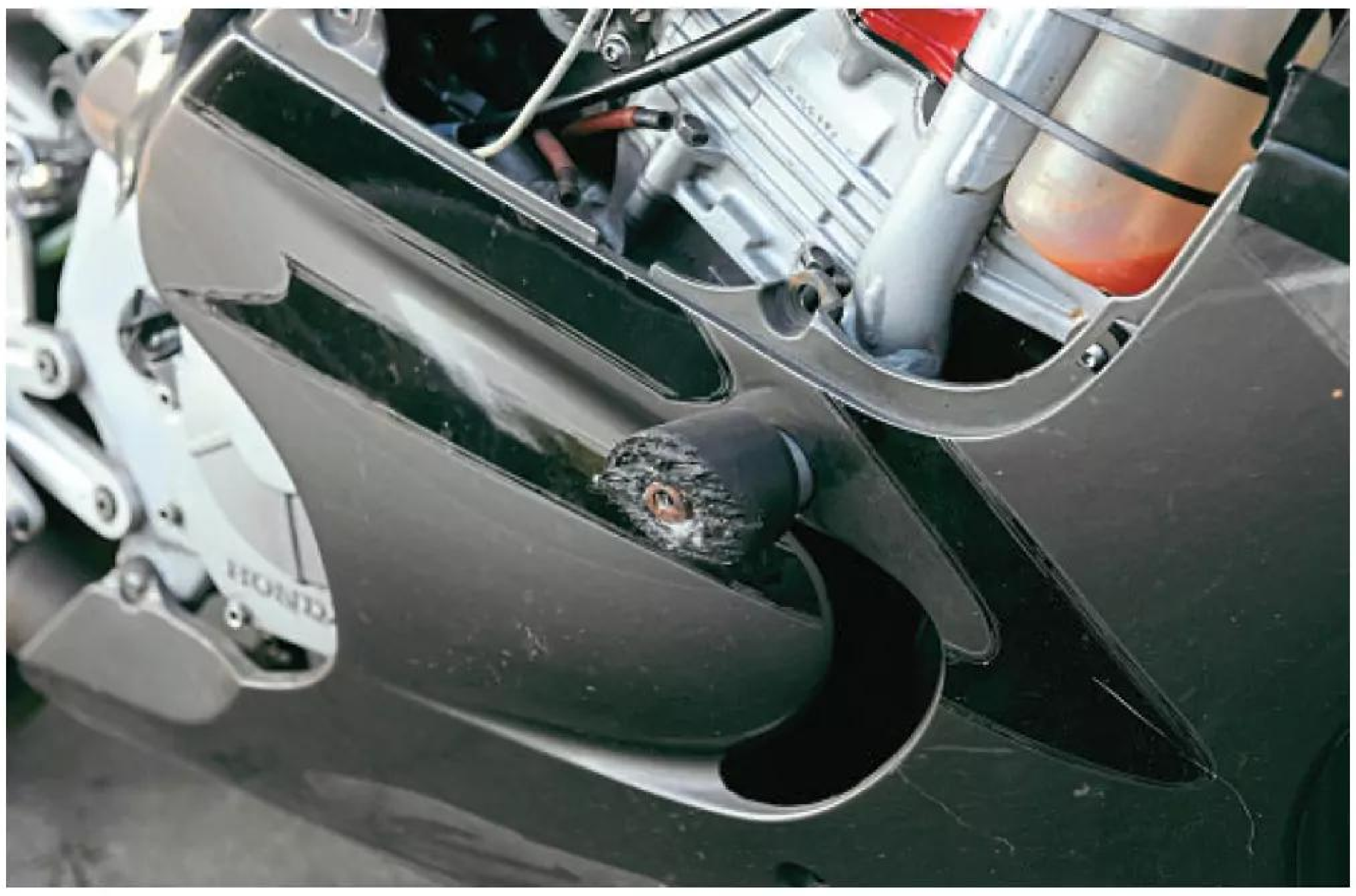
Words and photography by Matt

My reasoning is simple. I really should buy a VFR800 instead. That would give me a sporty bike, capable enough to ride to the odd track day, have fun, then come back – and which is also comfy for my old knees. But I don't have one; nor do I have any money anymore.

But I do have a Honda CBR600F, a bike that has all the plus points of the VFR (except for that wonderful mechanical roar), so with a little work, I could win here. Except the little work is never enough… and it needs a lot of work.

This 1997 CBR600FV was the 'safe bet' of 600 sportsbikes in the 1990s. As reliable as a *Daily Mail* reader moaning about everything, it won championships, TTs, and was the foundation for hundreds of new riders and also those looking for a do-it-all bike. It was even comfortable.

This one, though, was found in the back of a shed, bought, and turned into a competitive race bike as well as rules would allow. Let down only by its substandard rider, it then got briefly converted into a tourer for Scotland, with lower 'pegs, higher 'bars, longer gearing, an enlarged fuel tank (because standard is about 125 miles until reserve and the Applecross loop overlooking Skye from the mainland is 130), a race seat converted into a boot, soft luggage, larger screen, heated grips and some touring tyres. Other than a wheel bearing, the CBR worked a treat as a tourer for thousands of miles, before getting flat 'bars, the largest rear sprocket, and runner-up twice in the national Motogymkhana championship. It has since spent the next 10 years in the dining room as a perch for the cats.



This bike should be finished by now, doing what Hondas from the 1980s and 1990s do – sitting quietly until you ask them to go, in which time they do, brilliantly and with no fuss. I've tried to get it on the road several times now, and it never mattered how appalling it looks, but little things have been a pain.

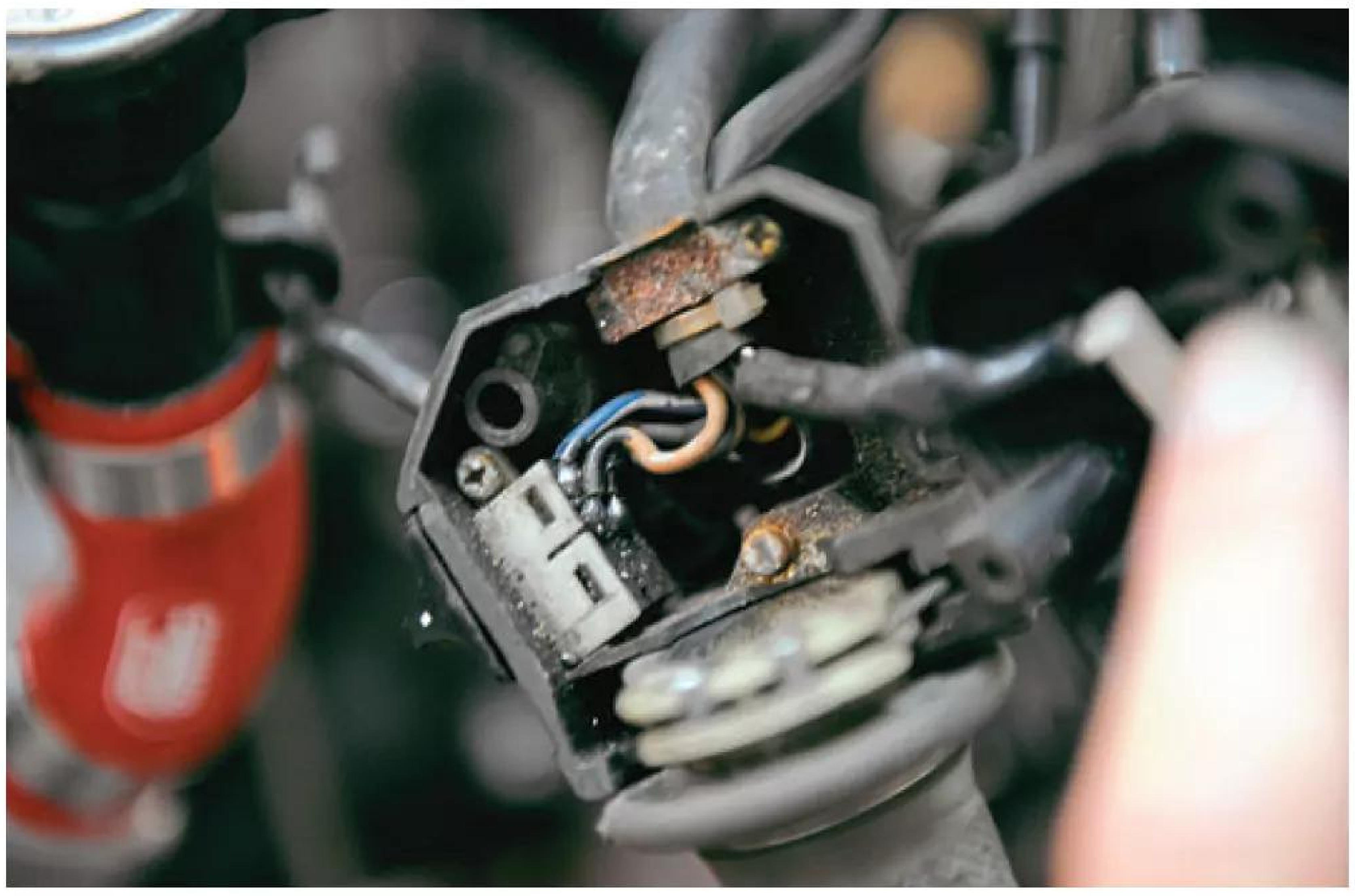
The issue has been age – parts are getting old. Come the late 1990s, bikes had one toe in the modern way of thinking, electronics were getting more sophisticated – though could still be fixed, brakes and suspension were looking like they do now, and carbs were as good as they would ever get. Boy, we didn't know how good we'd got it and had a real shock with the first fuel injection systems. They were like having dirt in the carbs – terrible!

But today, 30 years on, and plastics are starting to become fragile, wires are getting old, paint is tired, and those complex carbs are gummed up with new fuel. Then there is all the modifications from racing. Some can stay, like the wonderful, adjustable Maxton rear shock, K-Tech forks, beautifully rebuilt brakes and all those bearings that were regularly replaced and greased. But I'd cut off a load of unnecessary tabs from the frame, tabs which I now need to fit the original fairing panels that should look so much nicer than the old race fibreglass. I'd cut up the old wiring loom, which means I now need a new one, and while I have one, it's from an American import, so could be different. Bum.

So, what is the plan? Maria has bought a wonderful Aprilia RS660 sportsbike, which she is deeply in love with. The CBR should be a great companion, as well as a bike I can

➡

The Workshop



ride to a track, have a fun day, and ride home. And I always wanted one as a kid, watched them racing, finally raced one, and now want to enjoy it again.

BACK TO STANDARD

I put that US loom on as it was the correct year. All was fine, apart from the indicators have three wires going to them as they are on all the time in America. Result! I had indicators but no horn, starter but no headlight, a rear brake but no front, and nothing from the dash. I tried the spare dash I had, but nothing improved. The dash has a see-through, flexible plastic back with the circuits fixed on, but both had gone a dull green on the copper, and although I was confident this wasn't affecting the parts that weren't working, I wanted a working dash so ordered one from eBay.

A promise and £65 and it worked, and I had idiot lights, I had lighting for the clocks, I even had a sidestand warning – never had one of those before! Headlight still didn't work, nor did the front brake light switch, so out with the multimeter. I had power going in but not out of the

> ***"I've also found a new crash bobbin – those cotton reels you see sticking out the side – to replace the one that had, urm, done its job and sacrificed itself when I went over my talent allowance..."***

light switch, so it wasn't because of the US loom, but I needed a new right-hand switchgear – ordered. The brake light switch worked, so that must be a wire; I'm currently cutting into the loom.

The quickshifter is a fancy toy, so I wanted to keep that, but tidy the wiring. I also wanted standard footrests, not the rearsets my good old friend Smerf had made me, purely because of my knackered knees. These just needed cleaning up and I've lacquered them to keep them nice. I've also found a new crash bobbin – those cotton reels you see sticking out the side – to replace the one that had, urm, done its job and sacrificed itself when I went over my talent allowance…

The last time I used the bike, it had run nicely with revs and throttle, but at lower openings had felt horrid. The carbs run a high pressure/low pressure air system which had never mucked up before but needs checking. But I'd also replaced a quick-release fuel fitting to the tank, so thought I better get rid of that. It's all those small things. I'd put an original shock on earlier, but it felt like there's no damping left, so I popped the Maxton back on. Gearing should be right for the road, and just popping the seat on feels nicer than the race seat. The clip-on handlebars can stay for now; I'm not that old, yet…

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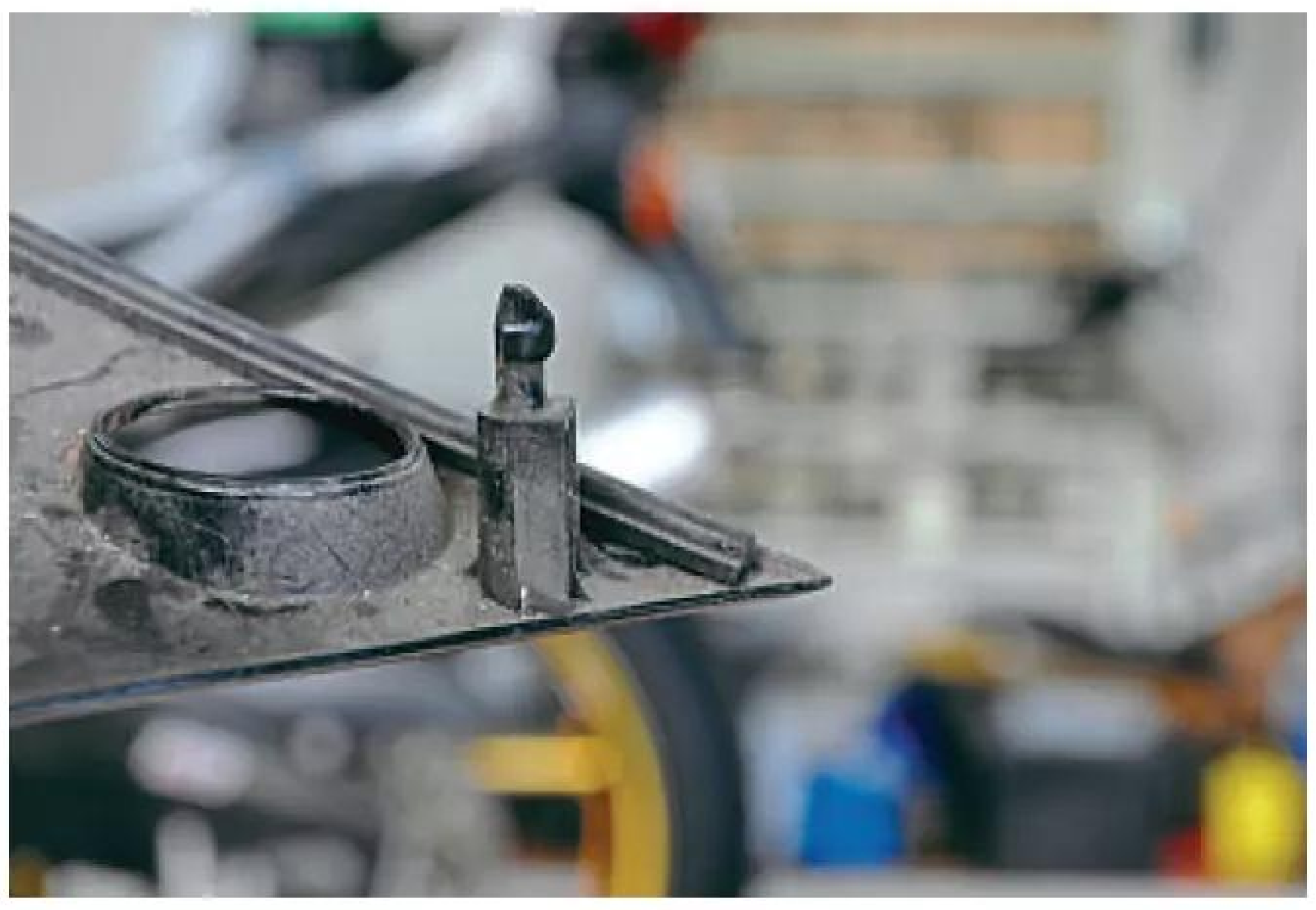

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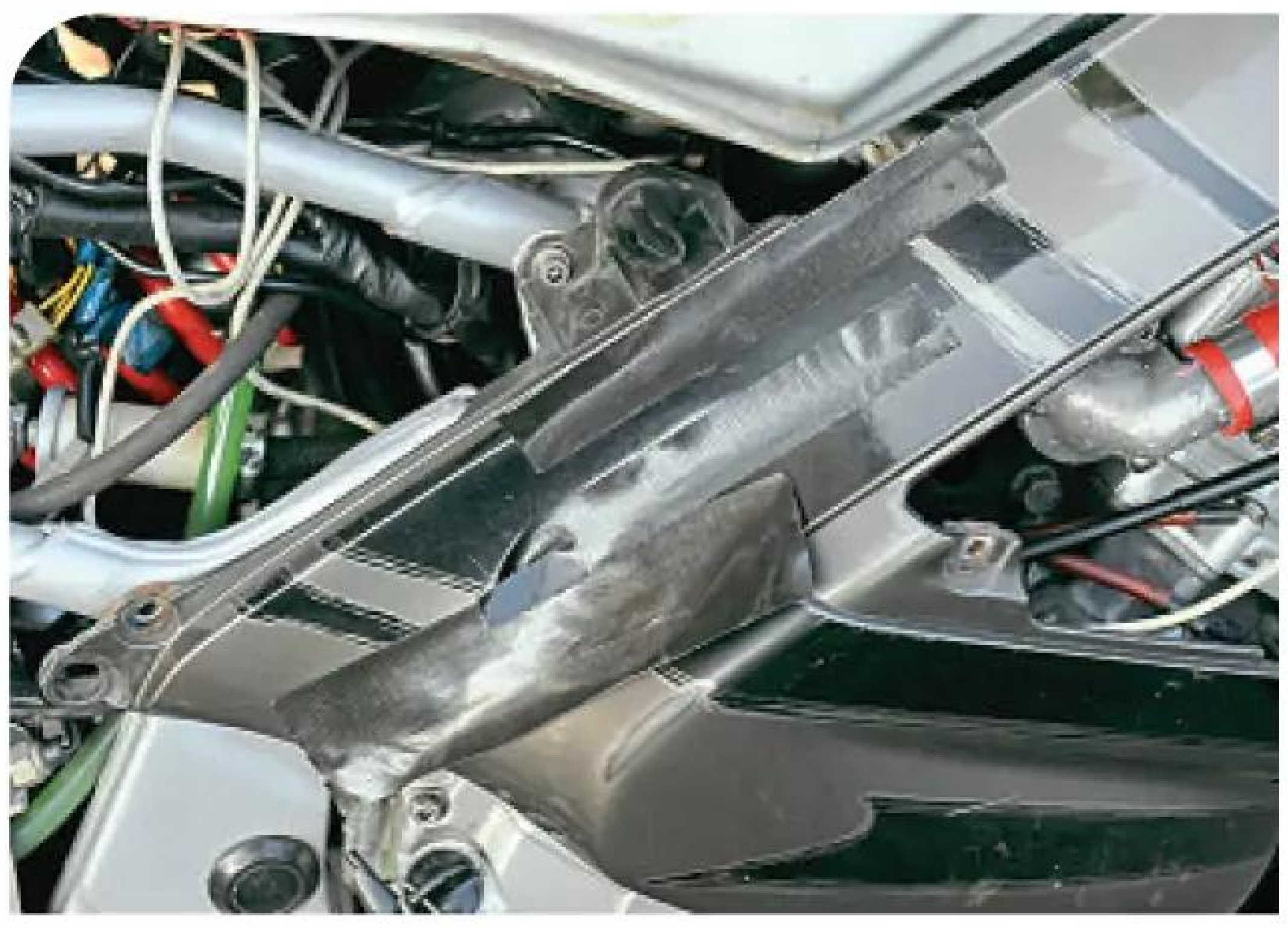

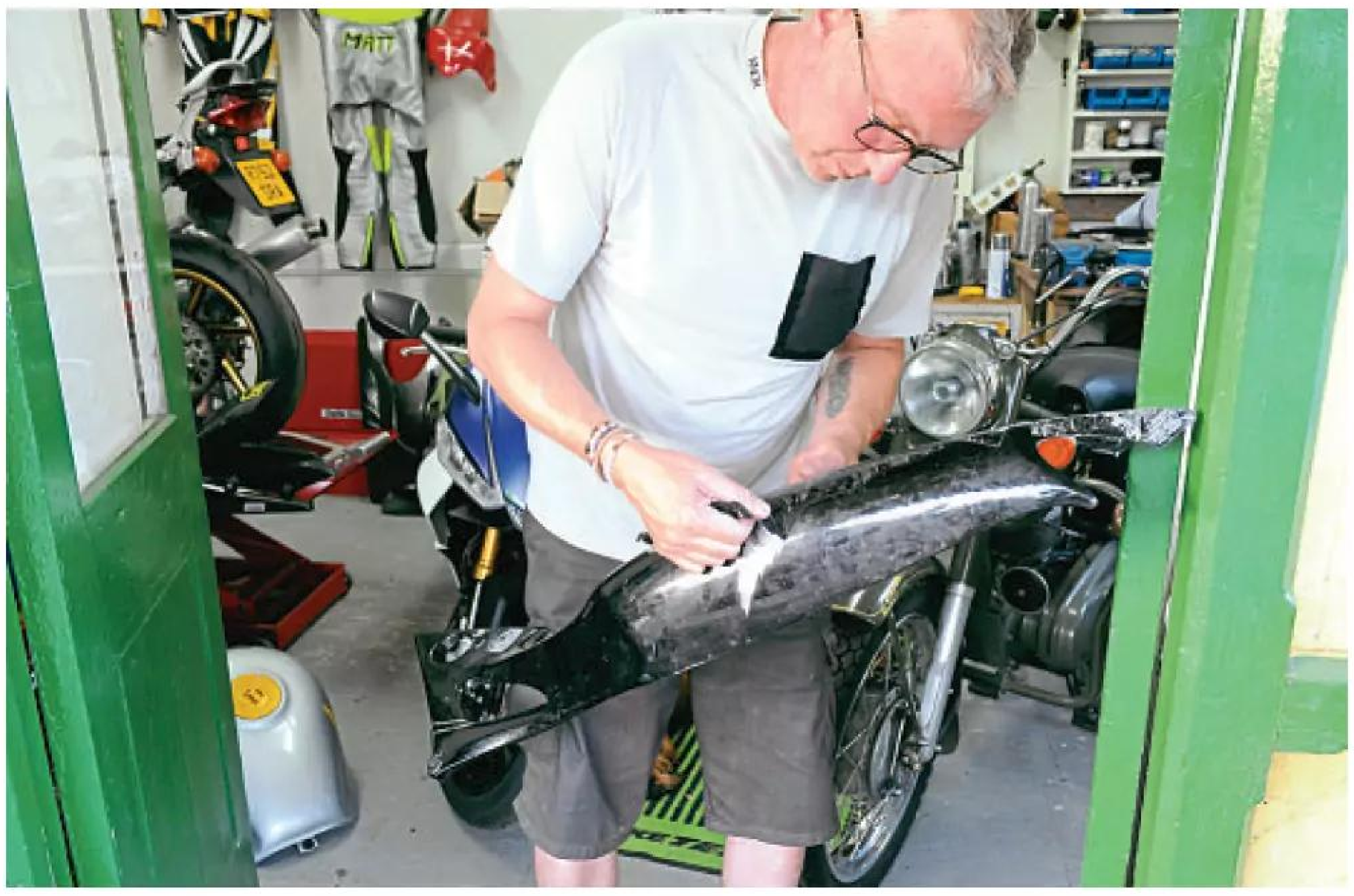

BODYWORK

With at least two sets of bodywork, I thought I could make this old sow's ear look like a silk purse. Maybe if I'd stored them properly, or they'd been okay in the first place, but they look horrid and broken now. The more flexible ABS plastic side panels are all right, but the more brittle top fairing and real panels have suffered. Breakages have been dealt with via two-part epoxy glue and reinforced with fiberglass, although I have got some missing 'fingers,' the plastic parts that go into the rubbers in the frame tabs. And the missing tabs have been cut from an old frame I had to be tacked on.

While the weather has been hot, I've had the bodywork out in the sunshine to soften the decals. It's worked a treat – the black decals are coming off nicely with a little heat from a gun and an old credit card, which doesn't hack into the paint underneath like a Stanley knife blade. Then I've been using acetone with a microfibre cloth to remove the glue, leaving an easy-to-rough-up-for-painting surface. But strangely, the silver decals are like a thin film so won't come off easily with heat; instead they have been best the old-fashioned way, with rough old 180-grit sanding discs, which isn't such a nice finish for painting. The fuel tank has already been painted before, so I'll just get that nicely flatted down.

I want to paint the panels in the 50th anniversary red, white and black scheme as you can see in the opening photo, as it looks easy to paint and the gold wheels should look corking with it. I really wanted the yellow and red flames of the TT-wining V&M bikes, but I'm not man-enough to ride a bike looking like that! The boys at CJ Ball, my local Honda dealer, found the Honda red code for me, so I'll paint the red, put the Honda decals on over the base coat, then lacquer over. The white should be good-quality white vinyl.

Indicators need fixing and two need swapping for better ones; I want to fit heated grips (no sniggering over there), and we should be getting there.

These bikes are still worth very little, so the balance between work, cost of parts and time are trickier than something you may get your money back on. But it's also a strength of what you're doing, as it's for you. Or me. And I can't wait. CBG

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Who do they think they are?

Frank Westworth is the editor of RealClassic magazine, the latest in a long series of publications that began in 1982 when he was bullied into producing *The Jampot*, the previously excellent magazine of the AJS & Matchless OC. He was also founding editor of *Classic Bike Guide* and has returned as a columnist as a penance. Or something. He has a mysterious obsession with riding obscure and elderly motorcycles, which he does very slowly...

Frank's Famous Last Words

Is enough ever actually enough? Frank's been scratching his head again...

WITH SEEMINGLY ENDLESS REPETITION and a certain dull monotony, every time I declare a project bike finished and consider the time, effort and expense involved, I also declare to anyone nearby – usually just a semi-comatose cat – that there will be no more. No more projects. In future, I shall spend all my free waking hours just riding bikes. I've ruined enough formerly pristine machines with my costly incompetence for a lifetime: now I'll just ride them. A nice thing about living near Bude is that I can always get Ace Motorcycles to fix my failures. Well… almost always.

As you've already deduced, this is another resolution doomed to failure. The inevitable truth is that I always enjoy fixing a bike or modifying it a bit to suit my ideas of what it should look like, ride like, or… or something. Any old excuse will do.

I was paddling through a small puddle of self-indulgence the other day, contemplating the most recent arrival in The Shed – a Triumph TR65 Thunderbird which I've mentioned before. The bike was a runner before I bought it, although its seized-on front brakes precluded any heroic test rides. Fixing the brakes fixed that, of course, so I set out into the lanes, just to see how horrid it was and whether it would actually make a riding machine, rather than just another project for the remote future.

Two things then happened in quick succession. Firstly, the old wreck rode very well. No, no; it did. What remained of its original fixtures and fittings still did what they'd been fitted and fixed for – apart from just about all of the non-essential electrics; lights, winkers, horn. You get the picture. And not long after I'd returned from the bike's first triumphant road miles in possibly a quarter century, an acquaintance mailed and asked whether I'd consider selling it to him. Amazing. I didn't know what to say. So I sent him a photo of it parked on the bench, ready for stripping.

But of course an actual offer focusses the mind somewhat. These are tough financial times, and financial prudence is a good idea, but… but… it is possible that the prospective purchaser would look at the bike and either run away screaming or offer me £100 or so for it. I paid much more than that. If I'd followed my own advice and looked at the bike first (it was in Manchester, I'm in Cornwall – there is a big distance between the two, as you may be aware) I would probably have offered £100. But that's the way the world works.

Inevitably, my original notion of simply riding around on the T'bird for the remainder of the summer somehow and by accident transformed into stripping it down to 'tidy up a few things.' It still has its engine in and stands on its wheels, but the rest of the poor old lump is scattered around The Shed in piles approximately related to their refurbishment requirements before they can return to service. I'm going to need a lot of paint.

Unusually in my recent experience of such things, the bike is comprehensively and remarkably worn out. Most of its wiring is home-made and wrapped in ancient insulating tape – I've just returned from a happy hour of peeling off yards of the stuff, discovering a curious tendency of the previous owner to solder joints together and then wrap them in yards of tape. A lot of the tape is blue. Who uses blue tape and why?

But the biggest surprise was the corrosion. Most of my more recent rebuilds have been bikes repatriated from North America, so the chrome was mostly original and excellent, the paint creatively faded and all rubberware roasted beyond use. They've also been very low mileage and easy to work on. The old T'bird is not like that. It is amazingly filthy inside the bodywork, under the tank – even inside the headlight! Remarkable. I have already decided to buy a new parts washer and a vast supply of bogus gunk-like cleaning fluids. I'll decide which make to buy sometime around Christmas, probably. Never rush into things. Such as buying a bike unseen, untested and unridden.

Of course, there's another actual fact. Underneath all the filth, grime and oily corrosion is a very desirable model. And although in today's declining market I'll never get my money back, if I do a decent job with the resurrection shuffle there should be a grand bike at the end of it.

But this is definitely my last project. No. More. Projects. How are those for famous last words? CBG

> *"Inevitably, my original notion of simply riding around on the T'bird for the remainder of the summer somehow and by accident transformed into stripping it down to 'tidy up a few things.' It still has its engine in and stands on its wheels, but the rest of the poor old lump is scattered around The Shed."*

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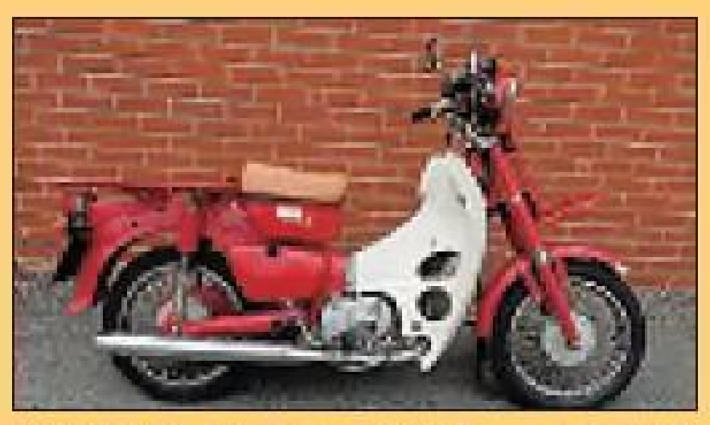
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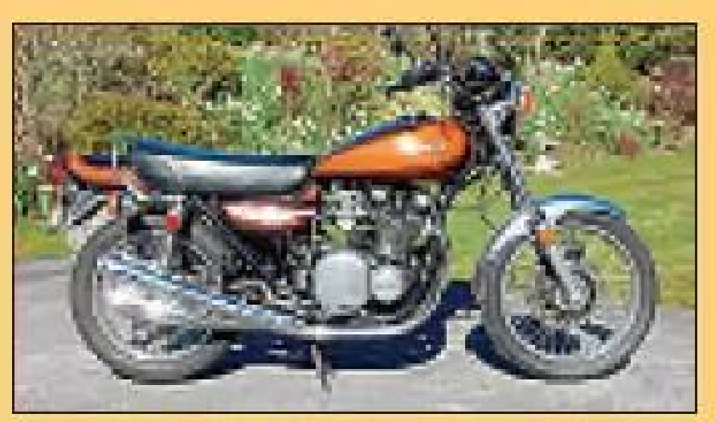
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